

Norfolk Trip – August 2014

After our trips to Dumfries and Galloway and The Highlands had faded into distant memories it was nice to know that we had a week booked off in August to look forward to. Wendy had grabbed the only available week off and pencilled it in on her works calendar. All the other members of staff have kids, so every week during the summer holidays was booked, apart from that one! It wasn't ideal for us with the cost of the boat being ridiculously high as well as the super inflated prices of holiday cottages. This was the least of our worries though, as when we trawled through accommodation websites we found everywhere in Norfolk to be booked up for the week we wanted. We began to panic and started looking at places in Wales as well as expensive places we'd already been to in Norfolk that we'd got for cheap when they were out of season. We knew fine well that they'd be well out of our price range in summer and we weren't wrong! Incredibly even they were booked up, so we started to scrape the barrel and out of sheer desperation we even considered going back to the cottage we'd stayed in and hated last summer. It had to be better than nothing? When I looked I was amazed to find that it too was booked up until October! Uh oh! Not only was finding somewhere to stay a problem but booking the boat was proving impossible too. If we could go on the Wednesday night sailing we'd have a cabin and it would be ½ the price too but Wendy couldn't get the Friday off. Arrghhhhhhhh! She asked one of the girls if she could swap a day with her so she could work the Friday instead and she said she'd look into it. We'd hit a brick wall and it looked as though we'd have to reshuffle our holiday plans and put it back to later in the year. Wendy couldn't wait much longer though and desperately wanted to get away for a summer break.

A few weeks passed and the holiday was still un-booked, so I picked up from where I'd left off and started looking again, this time removing WIFI as a requirement and extending the area much further inland than before. This drew up a blank at every broker type website like cottages4u etc. Out of desperation I just typed my search straight into google and to my surprise I stumbled over a lovely looking cottage south of Sheringham. It wasn't the best location but beggars can't be choosers and I enquired about it as soon as I could. How it wasn't on any of the broker sites I'll never know. It was available, dog friendly, had WIFI and wasn't massively over priced so I booked it.....Phew! We now had somewhere to stay, so having heard nothing back from her work colleague I booked the disgustingly overpriced boat (500 quid!!). There were no dog cabins available for the journey home when we'd most need it (at 2.15am!) but we'd just have to cross that bridge when we came to it. Wendy was gutted when she saw her colleague next and was told she could work the Friday for her. By then it was too late and we could've saved ourselves a small fortune by going on the Wednesday boat but hey ho, at least we were actually going :). She was also very glad to see that the hygienist was off on the Friday afternoon, so she could finish early. This would of course mean that she'd owe them an afternoon but she'd be free to get ready to go away and wouldn't have the big rush after work to deal with.....Yey!

With only a couple of weeks until we were due to go away we didn't have long to plan or get our heads round the fact that we were actually going. Lyca hadn't been herself after being spayed and having her hernia fixed. She'd only had her stitches out the week before we went, so we crossed our fingers that she'd snap out of it. Wendy was adamant that she was getting too old to stay up all night and sleep in the car, even though I was totally up for it. I figured that it'd be better to head straight for Norfolk after the boat while the roads were empty but she was having none of it. I then had to find a dog-friendly Travelodge, so we

could get our heads down for a few hours to combat the tiredness and break up the journey.

This Norfolk trip was going to be very different to our past ones, due to having Lyca with us. We'd cleverly joined Norfolk Wildlife Trust a few years ago and in that time had saved ourselves a fortune on entrance fees into all their great reserves. This time we wouldn't be able to go into any of them with Lyca, so our membership was now useless. I even emailed them to ask if they had any plans of changing their no dog policy but they replied saying that they didn't. The only proper reserve we could take her to would be RSPB's Titchwell, where we could go on the public footpath, past the fresh marsh and down to the beach, which wasn't too bad I suppose. The only thing I could think of doing was trying to find footpaths that ran alongside our favourite reserves in the hope that we could get near enough to see anything that could potentially pop up. This seemed a bit optimistic though, as things never seem to pop up when we're away, it's usually during the weeks before and after! That said, seeing as we wouldn't be able to go to most places you could practically put money on tons of amazing things turning up! With reports of Spotted Crake, Black-winged and Collared Pratincole, Purple Heron, Red-footed Falcon, Red-necked Phalarope and Red-backed Shrike coming in during the weeks running up to our trip we couldn't help but think that we'd picked yet another 'in between' week to go :(.

With just 4 days to go I'd dropped my car off to get the tracking sorted and collected it during my lunch hour. It was sooooo much better and I headed home to get some food £100 worse off. As I approached Anagh Coar roundabout my heart was in my mouth as a woman drove straight through it without looking right. I slammed my brakes on, hoping to avoid a massive crash and nearly managed to avoid a collision altogether but at the last second.....Crunch! :(I couldn't believe it! If the damage was bad I'd have to get a hire car to go away in but luckily when I checked it didn't seem too awful. Nevertheless I was gutted, my otherwise undamaged car now had a dent in the front wing and my headlight had popped out. The repairs couldn't be done till we got back so I had to do a bodge job on the headlight to keep it steady and just had to ignore the big dent in my wing. :(

On a slightly happier note though we'd been able to book a Tesco delivery for our arrival at the cottage, so we wouldn't have to go shopping on the way! :). On our last trip Wendy had to do the shopping while I sat in the car with Lyca, who spent the rest of the journey sandwiched between several bags of precariously placed shopping, as the car was rammed already!

Friday 8th August

After a day at work (or ½ a day for someone) I went home to get ready. Unbelievably it wasn't windy in the slightest so at least we had one bit of luck to start the trip with. We arrived at the Sea Terminal at 6.52pm and hoped it wouldn't be long before we got going. From the car we saw **Herring Gull, Swallow, Feral Pigeon, Great Black-backed Gull, Starling, Pied Wagtail and Jackdaw**. A **Redshank** flew over the car park heading for the harbour and at 7.05pm we were joining the queue to embark. Yet again I'd timed it to perfection and we hadn't had a long wait at all. We went upstairs to get the cabin key and Lyca was impressively well behaved all the way to the cabin. She had lots of admirers on the way and at 7.15pm we let ourselves in and got settled. From the window we could see **House Martins** whizzing around the houses up on Head Road and also a **Magpie**. Not exactly exciting birds but it was a start. Shortly

after we'd set off Wendy spotted a **Manx Shearwater** so when we were far enough out we went up onto the deck for a bit of sea watching.



Calm crossing

Straight away we could see a large group of dark birds sitting on the water and our initial thoughts of Auks were thrown out when some of them lifted. They were in fact all Manxies and they were everywhere. There was also a constant stream of them flying past the boat and some birds came quite close. Looking elsewhere we found **Gannet**, **Razorbill** and huge numbers of Auks, which were too distant to ID. We kept trying and passed an area of sea full of **Jellyfish**, we then found a **Fulmar** and came across loads of rubbish, not surprisingly mainly plastic, bobbing about in the water. What a mess! After having a rant about how disgusting it is that people can be so thoughtless we found 2x Terns sitting on a big floating object but they were way too far off to confirm which type. By then Wendy was getting cold and I was starting to feel hungry but before I went back in I wanted to go up to the top deck, as I'd never been there before. The view from up there was much better and I could see all around me without having to move sides. Lyca having produced nothing on the lower deck decided to have a wee on the rubber matting, which accumulated into a puddle within the holes :O! Of all the places to do it she'd picked the worst and it wasn't going to disappear anywhere in a hurry.

Back in the cabin I pressed the button for room service and before long I was munching away on my usual chicken burger and chips. It was demolished in no time and the crossing was beginning to get boring. Wendy lay down with Lyca and actually managed to get a bit of sleep but I just couldn't. It was a huge relief when we finally docked at Heysham and we were disembarking early at 11.10pm and on our way to the Sleaford Travelodge.

Saturday 9th August

The journey down was extremely non eventful and without even so much as a glimpse of an Owl, Fox or even a Rabbit! There were warnings of flash flooding in Cambridgeshire, which was slightly worrying considering we were on our way to Norfolk, a place, which is famed for flooding! The forecast for Norfolk on Sunday was thunderstorms and 8mm of rain, which was the last thing we wanted to hear. It wasn't long before we hit the heavy rain and it didn't stop for the rest of the drive. There were signs telling us that one of our roads was closed, which would mean taking a diversion again but luckily it didn't happen

and I drove straight through. The rain was relentless and it became extremely heavy after our turn off to Sleaford making visibility poor and there were lots of standing water that was hidden on the dark roads. It was also going to make getting all our stuff out the car at the Hotel very unpleasant. Urghghg.

At 2.02am we arrived at the Travelodge and breathed a sigh of relief. I parked up outside the door, so we didn't have so far to go with the cases in the torrential rain, which worked a treat. Lyca on the other hand was proving slightly trickier to keep dry. The ground was soaking and as she'd been in the car for so long Wendy wanted to try to get her to have a wee before bed. She sniffed around and ran about on the grass before finally performing but by then the damage was done and she was wet and had muddy pawsUh oh! After getting the keys from a very friendly and dog loving member of staff we let ourselves into the room and Lyca instantly jumped up onto the nice clean white-sheeted bed!



Uh oh!

There were muddy paw prints all over it and we'd only just arrived. You can't take her anywhere :P. Wendy then realized that we'd forgotten our water so we had to go downstairs again to see what was in the vending machine....Urrghhhh! I ended up having to go all the way back out to the car in the rain to get ours but Lyca created a lot of attention from one of the night staff who was more than happy to give her lots of fuss. After we'd all had a drink we eventually crawled into bed at 2.37am and after a quick look at the Little Chef breakfast menu we switched off the lights and slept like logs. Wendy had been right all along and it was definitely a better way to do it than driving all night and sleeping in the car.

At 9am we were awake but still feeling very tired after just 6 ½ hrs sleep. We could hear **House Sparrows** chirping outside the window and the 1st job was to take a very excited Lyca outside. It was, as forecast, incredibly windy but we'd been very lucky that it'd started after our boat crossing. It was the tail end of a hurricane, which was threatening to stick around for the duration of our trip. It was nice and sunny though and after getting ourselves ready we packed up and headed next door to Little Chef for breakfast seeing a **Wood Pigeon** on the way.



Travelodge

I sat on a bench outside with Lyca in the strong wind while Wendy went inside to order. A few minutes later our food was brought out and we tucked in. I'd ordered the breakfast pancakes but wished I'd got something better and started to envy Wendy, as mine was just a Fanta and 2x small pancakes with butter and jam. She'd cleverly ordered the works, a Cappuccino with 2x toast, beans, mushrooms and tomatoes, which she thought would fill her up and give her energy for the morning ahead. All of a sudden she noticed that the tomatoes were missing and that there was no salt to put on it, as it was pretty tasteless. She ran back inside to tell them and had to pick up a sachet of salt from the Burger King counter. A minute later her tomatoes arrived and she united them with the rest of her now cold breakfast. The staff were really friendly and helpful though and the woman who came out with the food made a huge fuss of Lyca. Watching Wendy trying to eat it in the wind was quite amusing though. Her hair, even though she'd had to tie it back, was still finding its way into her mouth and the bits of rubbish were flying around all over the place. It didn't look easy and she even found some dried up bean juice in the ends of her hair later that day! After that she was stuffed and raring to go whereas I still felt slightly empty and disappointed.....Hahahahaha!

As we were getting into the car a Spitfire went over, which is always nice to see and we saw some **Black-headed** Gulls. We left at 10.20am, which was a late start for us but we were in no great hurry. There'd been no reports of anything to hit on the way to the Cottage apart from a very elusive Black-winged Praticole at Ouse Washes. With the reports of it being so few and far between we didn't hold much hope but it was another new reserve for us and seeing as we couldn't get into the cottage until 4pm it looked worthy of a visit anyway. The only problem was with the flooding from the previous night would we even be able to get there! :-\ There were still good numbers of **Swifts** zooming over the A17 and further along we added **Collared Dove**, **Kestrel** and passed a field full of **Carriion Crows**. A suicidal **Blackbird** flew low over the road at a roundabout and we saw a **Rook** before pondering over how weird Lincolnshire is. It's such a big place but because it's so flat you can't see any further than the fields on either side of the road.....Strange. There was a Glider in the sky, which Wendy reckoned looks very chilled out but I think it would probably be quite scary in reality. The next birds we saw were a female **Pheasant** in a field and a **Moorhen** in a drainage ditch but we also noticed a Dragonfly over the road at a give way. When we got nearer to our 1st stop off we found a nice **Yellowhammer** in a bush and a **Stock Dove** flew over.

Amazingly the floods must have cleared pretty quickly and we arrived at Ouse Washes RSPB at 12.05pm. Wendy's 1st port of call was the WC's and a couple of minutes later she emerged and shouted over, "New Moth!" She excitedly came over to get the camera telling me that it was a lifer and absolutely massive. There we were again finding ourselves hanging around toilet blocks with cameras! We just hoped it wasn't going to be the only place we found anything interesting during the week!.....Urrghhhh! She went back in and came out with a pic to show me and it was definitely a new one for us, so I poked my head round for a quick look. Luckily there was nobody about otherwise I'd have felt more than a bit awkward! We ID'd later and after getting a bit excited about what it was it turned out to be just a Red Underwing. Although that was still a lifer for both of us



Red Underwing

It was hot and sunny but that wind was really making its presence known, so it was hard to know what to wear. While we were getting our stuff together we noticed a Dragonfly flying around in the car park and when we got a view of it we saw that it was a **Brown Hawker**. Another one appeared from somewhere, which was a **Migrant Hawker** so we watched them bombing about for a while. As it was a new reserve for us we had no idea where we were going but I'd found out that we had to cross a bridge, then turn left and follow the path all the way down until we'd nearly reached a railway bridge. We didn't know how far it was or anything so we set off glad that it was a nice day.



Ouse Washes

When we reached a bridge to get over the main Fen drain we could hear a familiar holiday birdcall. Wendy called out, “**Green Woodpecker!**” as a juvenile flew over the river and disappeared into a stand of trees. Cool! Another closely followed it and they continued to screech and squawk until they were out of our range. Our next bird was a **Goldfinch** and as we joined the path we could see that the railway bridge was absolutely miles away and a tiny speck in the distance....Urrghhhh! The sound of **Crickets** filled the air and it felt like being on holiday.....Oh wait a minute, we were! Either side of the path was a verge, which ran alongside the ditch and a high bank with steps up to some nicely spaced out hides, which overlooked the semi-flooded fields. Both areas had been left to grow and it was rich in wildflowers and grasses. This was working well for insects and we managed to clock up **Small Tortoiseshell, Large White, Green-veined White, Meadow Brown, Common Blue** and what was probably **Holly Blue Butterflies**. There were also **Blue-tailed** and **Common Blue Damselflies** and a Chaser type Dragonfly, which we didn’t get a view of and couldn’t ID. So many things thriving in such a small area :).

We decided to have look from Grose Hide and climbed up the steps with Lyca in tow. We weren’t sure if dogs were allowed in the hides but we hadn’t seen any signs saying otherwise, so we took a chance. She behaved impeccably in there even though it was her 1st time in a hide, which was a great relief because we weren’t alone.



Hide Dog

There was an elderly couple in there already scanning the area with their bins. We had a quick scan but there wasn't much about, so when the bloke announced, "3x Buzzards on the posts." our ears pricked up and we had a look. Wendy's head spun round and she mouthed the words, "Wood Pigeons!" to me and so as not to make it obvious I gave a nod. A **Cormorant** flew over and a **Marsh Harrier** floated over the reeds in the field in front of us. On a pool were **Mute Swan, Mallard**, loads of scruffy looking **Ruff** and **Lapwing** and 2x **Reed Buntings** flew in. That seemed to be it so we moved off to the next hide. From Churchman's Hide we only added **Tufted Duck** and were just about to leave when a **Red Admiral Butterfly** flew past the window, which made Wendy notice something else at the back of the field that we doubted we'd see at all during the week. We thought we'd be too late for these birds but she'd spotted a lovely **Hobby** flying low over the field....Woo Hoo! It was too far away for anything decent but I grabbed a rubbish record shot anyway.



Hobby

After that we headed towards the Cadbury Hide for a quick look and saw a **Grey Heron** flying over the path on the way. From that hide we found **Common Tern, Meadow Pipit** as well as our first ever **Clouded Yellow Butterfly**. There'd been

loads of reports of these in huge numbers over the past week and we hoped to see one and even had a specific site pinpointed. We were now able to see the railway bridge clearly and a row of Birders standing up on the bank, so we were nearly there and left the hide for a desperate attempt at seeing a lifer.

It was 2pm by the time we reached the 'twitch' and nobody was giving out any vibes that the bird had been seen recently :{.



Pratincole Twitch

Most of them were kicking their heels and looking bored and a couple were even sitting/lying down in the sun, so our initial impressions weren't good. Nevertheless we climbed up to join them and had a scan round. There'd been a couple of Common Cranes reported as well as the Pratincole, which was usually seen with the Lapwings. Within about 1min Wendy said, "**Common Crane!**" and directed me to it right at the back of the field asleep amongst the long grass. Not bad considering they're never guaranteed on a Norfolk trip :).



Twitch view

There were **Egyptian Geese** and we found the big flock of **Lapwing**, which everyone had their eyes on. Unfortunately there was no sign of anything else amongst them and with nothing much going on Wendy joined a couple of others and lay down to chill out in the sun. This created a bit of attention from the group of all male Birders surrounding us but they were probably checking in

disbelief that she was actually a real girl at a twitch! Wendy finally sat up and while we sat there we heard a **Sedge Warbler** and pulled out an actual **Buzzard**, a juv **Shelduck**, **Greylag Goose** and **Coot** and decided to call it a day shortly after. Our gut feelings had been spot on and with no new reports of our target bird since 10.30am we got up and left at 2.25pm. Our only consolation was that we'd the seen and had cracking views of the much more rare Oriental Pratincole at Frampton Marsh a couple of years ago.

Wandering back we found a juvenile **Yellow Wagtail** on the path, after I'd skillfully picked it up on call :). On the way to the twitch we'd missed out some of the hides, so decided, for the sake of completeness, to check the better ones out on the way back. The temperature had really soared by then and we were well overdressed.



Heading back

Stockdale's Hide produced **Ringed Plover**, **Teal**, a female **Shoveler** and 2 more Common Terns. There was a very butch looking woman in there, with a scope, who was quite entertaining though. She was really aggressive and was shouting out things about the birds to anyone who'd care to listen or possibly answer. One of her queries was whether or not the Plover she was looking at was a Little Ringed Plover but we'd have needed to use her scope to tell and neither of us fancied asking!

Next up was Kingfisher Hide where we heard then found 2x **Common Snipe** flying over. There was also **Little Egret**, **Greenshank**, **Green Sandpiper** and Wendy picked up the calls of a flock of **Long-tailed Tits**. Just before we left Wendy said that she'd found an Egret miles away that looked really big in comparison to the others and got me to take a record shot to confirm her suspicions. Sure enough it was a **Great White Egret**.

The walk back seemed endless and having run out of drinks we were really thirsty in the heat. Lyca had been OK, drinking from the many puddles she'd liked the look of on her walk but we were parched! We came across some juv Swallows sitting on a fence, so Wendy wanted to stop for a pic. The only problem was that I only had my big lense with us, as I'd put the macro on Wendy's camera and she doubted she'd be able to lift it. I kindly offered up my shoulder to use as a tripod and although she reckoned I was the most un-stable tripod she'd ever used, she ended up with this very sharp shot!



Swallow

When we eventually made it back to the car we grabbed a much needed drink each.....Phew! Lyca was given the breakfast she hadn't eaten earlier, wolfed the lot and then drank $\frac{1}{2}$ of Wendy's water too. Wendy went to make use of the last WC for miles while I worked out that our trip to try for the Ouse Washes Pratincole had clocked us up a walk of 4.8 miles! Not only that but we'd burned off an impressive 408kcal in the process of dipping on another great bird! When Wendy came back she'd found another huge moth the same as the one inside on the wall outside. I took my camera over to try for a better and less dodgy shot to help us ID it later...and failed.

It was 3.50pm when we finally left and we had a flock of **Linnets** flying over the road in front of us. We passed the 'Norfolk' sign at 4.11pm and let a cheer before realizing that we could easily get stuck in some seriously bad traffic at any point from then on. With it being the summer holidays the roads are a nightmare and we had to get to HQ before our Tesco delivery arrived between 6-7pm :O. Although Lyca was curled up asleep in the back, we were now getting restless and bored. Wendy had resorted to IDing the crops growing in the fields and was randomly shouting out, "Lettuce!" "Sprouts!" and "Oh look a field of potatoes drying out in the sun!" To wake us up we had a **Sparrowhawk** zoom over the road and a **Brown Hare** in a field near Glandford. Glandford is where we'd gone (and got lost), on a few occasions, for the Black Redstart last year and I'd completely forgotten just how lethal one of its junctions was but this time we got through without a hitch.....Phew!

Luckily my Sat Nav had served me well and we arrived at Garden Cottage at 5.30pm, which gave us bags of time to get our stuff in before Tesco.



Garden Cottage (on the right)

I brought the cases in while Wendy dealt with the unpacking and Lyca, who'd made herself very much at home within seconds :D. The cottage was actually even nicer in the flesh than it'd looked on the website and had been cleaned to clinical perfection, which doesn't happen very often and a real bonus.



Living room

The welcome pack laid out on the dining table by the owner, was amazing and must've cost her a fair bit! There was a box of Yorkshire Teabags (the best tea!), expensive butter, local semi-skimmed milk, bread from the local bakery, a bottle of proper local posh Norfolk pressed Apple Juice, a jar of quality Norfolk Jam, the local Newspaper and a tin containing a huge home-made Victoria Sponge Cake (she must have knew I was coming!!).....Wow! Wendy didn't have to wait till Tesco came for a cup of tea after all but I had to wait till I got my Lacto-free milk.....Boooooooo :(While Wendy was busy unpacking upstairs there was a knock at the door and it turned out to be the owner! She'd dropped by for a courtesy call, shock horror, but was very helpful about the cottage and local information. She definitely ran her venture well and even her décor choice was spot on! Come to think of it even the cling-film was from M&S and microwave safe! Wendy liked her choice of paint so much I emailed her when we were back at home to ask what it was but Wendy's dreams were shattered when she told me it was from some exclusive local company and VERY expensive!

By about 6.15pm Wendy was starving and couldn't wait any longer for tea. She'd brought a load of her Mum's homegrown tomatoes away with her and seeing as we had bread and butter, from the welcome pack, tomatoes on toast was a very tempting prospect. While I watched her eating I started to worry, as it was getting very close to 7pm. In fact 7pm came and went, so we started wondering about how far it was to the nearest supermarket, in case we had to go shopping ourselves.....Urrghhhh! Luckily at about 7.15pm Wendy spotted the Tesco van pulling up outside and quickly moved into the kitchen with Lyca while I brought the shopping in.



Kitchen

After the shopping was put away I set about having my long overdue tea and Wendy went for a well-earned soak in the bath. She was very pleased that there was enough hot water, as more often than not she finds herself shivering in a cold bath on the 1st night before we've been able to work out the water system. When she came back downstairs we realized that we were both a bit red in the face. I'd put sun cream on but Wendy hadn't and we'd obviously been slightly burned during our walk at Ouse Washes....Oooops! There was no phone in the house and as Giff Gaff were now charging for Manx calls Wendy was going to have to use her mobile to call her Mum each night. We watched a bit of TV and felt very relaxed and at home, so we knew we were going to enjoy our stay.

The forecast for the following day was looking very dodgy with the remnants of the hurricane tail still hanging around. Wendy said she didn't care and would be happy to have a chill out/recovery day at the cottage if the worst came to the worst. Would it actually happen or had the forecasters got it wrong? Only time would tell but we decided to put the Moth Trap out for a couple of hours until the rain started before we went to bed.



Moth trap

We were quite excited as to what we were going to catch being in Norfolk but slightly disappointed as to what we found inside. Maybe we'd have had a better catch if it'd been out all night but we couldn't leave it out if it was going to rain. When I brought it in at 10.30pm we'd caught (with the lifers in bold):

Macro's:

Ruby Tiger x1

Garden Carpet x2

Common Footman x1

Large yellow Underwing x2

Lesser broad-bordered Yellow Underwing x2

Mother of Pearl x1

Brimstone x1

Heart and Dart x1

Flame Shoulder x3

Common Rustic x2

Shuttle-shaped Dart x1

Micro's:

Anania coronata x1

Total = 18 (12 sp)

Lyca was happily exploring her holiday garden but when she started barking I went outside to investigate. She'd only gone and found a **Hedgehog**! After tearing her away from tormenting the poor creature we finally packed up and headed off to bed at 11pm. As it was going to be a wet day Wendy planned to stay in bed and catch up on some good old sleep for as long as possible in the morning. There was no point leaping out of bed at the crack of dawn, so the idea sounded good.

Sunday 10th August

By 6am my IBS was so bad I had no choice but to get up, which in turn woke Wendy up too. Lyca was dancing round the bedroom like a nutter and raring to go, so I took her downstairs with me. Wendy couldn't go back to sleep after that and ended up getting up shortly after, which wasn't exactly the plan she'd had in mind. She let Lyca out 1st and set about finding out what birds she could find in

the garden. There were **Robin, Chaffinch, Blue Tit** and **Wren** and she heard the flapping of wings and a call from the field behind, which she knew was some kind of Partridge. I played her the calls of Grey Partridge but it wasn't that but when she heard **Red-legged Partridge** it confirmed the ID. The garden was the perfect size for Lyca and she had space to run around and have a good sniff. Lyca wasn't the only one who was having a sniff as Wendy's nostrils had been drawn to the lovely smelling herb garden. There was Parsley, Thyme, Rosemary and Sage with a Lavender border and with the sun bringing out the aromas it made her hungry just standing next to it. After we'd got everything sorted for the day ahead we left HQ earlier than planned at 9am.

My 1st port of call was the Petrol Station, as my tank was nearly empty already and we needed to get to Titchwell. We drove past a dead Stoat in the road, which we hoped wasn't the only one we'd see during the week. For the past couple of weeks there'd been a Spotted Crake, which would very infrequently put in an appearance, by the island Hide at Titchwell. Having dipped on a few Spot Crakes in the past we really hoped to see this one but it wasn't going to be a pleasant experience. We arrived at Titchwell at 9.59am just in time for the heavens to open! It was torrential, so we sat in the car hoping that it would ease off sooner rather than later. Wendy nipped to the WC's for a moth check and came back absolutely soaked already, having found nothing at all. In the end we had no choice but to just go for it and Wendy tucked her trousers into her socks, which wasn't a good look but better than dragging them through the puddles. She also put Lyca's coat on in preparation for the worst.....and by that I mean on the dog not herself :P. We set off and were all absolutely drenched within seconds....Urrghhhh!



Oh dear!

At the 1st pool we could just about make out (through our rain covered glasses) **Pochard, Curlew, Gadwall** and **Little Grebe** and quickly scuttled off to the Public Hide. Normally we'd be able to take shelter and dry off our glasses inside the hide but having Lyca with us meant that we had to stay outside in the rain. We stood and watched the reeds to the right of the hide where it'd been seen but there was no sign. Out on the Fresh Marsh there were loads of **Avocets, Black-tailed Godwits**, female **Pintail, Spoonbills** asleep on an Island miles away and we heard a **Reed Warbler**. Wendy unsurprisingly decided to have a Karl Pilkington stop, so we didn't stick around for long. I wanted to go and check the Brackish Marsh while we were there to try for the Spotshanks and anything else we might pick up, which didn't make me very popular with Wendy. By then our

trousers were sticking to our legs and we'd both developed a kind of weird robotic style of walking but we carried on regardless. We only added **Sandwich Tern** and **Grey Plover** from there and it was becoming practically impossible to see anything, so much to Wendy's relief, we called it a day. To make up for our horrible and unproductive start to the day we hit the Café but again having Lyca with us meant we'd have to stay outside underneath the umbrellas at the benches. I went over to order Wendy's Cappuccino and sneakily got some millionaires shortbread and some consolation toast and butter to cheer us up. It wasn't easy buttering the toast with the rain lashing down and the wind trying to blow the butter papers away but Wendy managed it in the end and it went down a treat.

Back at the car it was 11.30am and the thought of sitting down on the leather seats in wringing wet trousers didn't appeal to Wendy at all. So much so that she actually took them off in the car park! I turned the heaters on to try and warm us up and Wendy stuck her trousers on the dash to dry them out as best she could.....hahahahaha! All in all it had been a thoroughly unpleasant morning and we didn't fancy repeating it again in a hurry. Yet again we'd been defeated by a Spot Crake and resigned ourselves to the fact that we'd never see one, so I demolished the millionaires shortbread to cheer myself up but it wasn't very nice :(My next plan was to go to a field opposite Choseley Drying Barns to find Clouded Yellow Butterflies, which someone had counted 20-30 of a couple of days ago as well as hundreds of day flying Latticed Heath Moths, which would be a lifer for us both. Wendy kept telling me that there was no point with the weather being so bad but I couldn't think of anything else to do and stuck to my plan.

Approaching Choseley Wendy spotted some **Grey Partridge** in the road including some young birds. We parked up but there was no sign of any insects, which would all be lying low and keeping out of the rain and wind. The conditions couldn't have been more wrong if we'd tried! Wendy was admiring the brilliant looking wildflower edges around the fields in the area and wanted a pic to show how good they'd be for wildlife. Having no trousers on didn't deter her in the slightest and she casually jumped out of the car and took some pics anyway :O. She just hoped that there were no 'bad weather' Birders out there with bins and scopes! :P.



Gloomy fields

We'd skillfully managed to time everything as badly as humanly possible so far and although it had forecast rain all day it started to clear up when we were miles away from Titchwell.....Typical!

Wendy had spotted 'Fat Face' on the way to Titchwell and wanted to go in for a look on the way back but didn't fancy going in looking like she'd just been hauled out from the sea. Fortunately by the time we got back there her trousers had just about dried out sufficiently to put back on and she went in. She must've been feeling depressed and when she came back to the car she'd cheered herself up with a bit of retail therapy. She'd bought a new top and bracelet from Fat Face and a hat from the shop next door, as well as a couple of ankle bracelets.....Hahahahahaha! She wouldn't be wearing them during the week, as they had bells on them and would scare off every bird for miles! The hat, even though she reckoned she looked like a Scarecrow in it, was a good buy though and would help keep the sun out of her eyes, her hair out of her face in the relentless wind and also the rain off her glasses :). By the time we were at Weybourne I eventually got a mobile signal and read my 1st BirdGuides notifications of the day. There'd been no sign of the Spot Crake at Titchwell and no further sign of the Black-winged Pratincole at Ouse Washes either. The report from the previous morning, a few hours before we'd got there, was the last ever report of the Prat, so it'd obviously seen us coming and cleared right off!

The only thing I wanted to do by then was go home to dry off and get changed and we spotted a **Jay** on the way. Trying to remember the way to HQ was trickier than I'd remembered, so we ended up getting slightly lost before arriving back at 1.30pm. I went upstairs to get changed and heard Wendy shriek that Lyca had jumped on the settee and put muddy paw prints all over the freshly cleaned covers. When the owner visited us the night before, I'd had to apologise for Lyca jumping on it but she assured me that it was fine and that she'd had to wash the covers after the previous occupants dog anyway. Looked like she'd have had to do it all over again after us, but what can you do? When I went back downstairs I brought the hairdryer with me and started to dry Lyca while Wendy ate her lunch. After she'd finished she took over and I ate mine.....we'd just have to cross our fingers that it didn't rain again later!

The weather had improved after lunch, so at 2.18pm we headed back out just in time for the rain to start again. Because of this we didn't want to go far, so I reckoned Weybourne would be a good move and we arrived at 2.29pm. I could park in the car park, we could wander onto the beach to sea watch and if it rained we wouldn't be far away and could run back before getting soaked again....Sorted! The car park was 50p for 30mins and we reckoned that would be all we'd need, so I got a ticket. We wandered down to the beach and found a **Common Seal** bobbing about near the shoreline.



Weybourne

There were a few groups of people milling about but looking out to sea it was dead and we only had 3x Common Terns fly by and a constant stream of Sarnies much further out. The cliffs there are an orangey colour and look very soft but when I touched the rocks my fingers were covered in a thick sticky almost tarry substance, which was actually very hard and not at all what I'd expected.



Cliffs

All of a sudden a massive band of rain appeared further up the beach and it looked nasty! We reckoned that it would be a good time to leave and we weren't the only ones. We ran back to the car before it caught up with us and it was 3pm, so the ticket was about to expire anyway. I got an alert of 5x Black Terns at Horsey earlier, which would definitely have flown past Weybourne. We'd obviously been too late but it just goes to show that you never know what you're going to see, even if it looks dead on 1st glances. The rain never did happen, so we stayed dry and it was meant to stop at 4pm, which meant we could do something else before heading home. I had just the place in mind and amazingly, even though we have been to Norfolk loads, it was a new place for us and best of all was that it was just down the road from HQ.

At 3.15pm I parked up at Sheringham Park just as the sky turned a very weird shade of black and the wind picked up big time. It wouldn't have surprised us if there'd been a thunderstorm in there somewhere.



Uh oh!

It looked so bad that we stayed put in the car until it passed over and I spotted a movement in the brambles in front of us. We had a look and Wendy said, “Female **Blackcap**!” which wasn’t what we’d hoped for really. Fortunately the heavy shower didn’t last long and there was no thunder, so I boasted about how well I’d timed it given the circumstances. At least we hadn’t arrived earlier and got caught in it! I got out to go and pay for the car park ticket just in time for another downpour, so I had to eat my words :(It was £4.90 for an all day ticket, with no other options, but between us we only had £4 change, so we wandered over to the café where Wendy bought a drink and got more change. I ran back to the car park and paid while she kept Lyca under control, as she was slightly excited by all the people.

It was still threatening more rain but we didn’t have all day and wandered down the path into the park. We were heading for the Rhododendrons, as this was the best place to find our target bird apparently. Straight off I heard a **Nuthatch** and coming from the exact spot I’d read about I picked up the high pitched calls of a **Firecrest**.....Woo Hoo! I got the bird in my bins and grabbed a quick record shot when it appeared for a split second.



Firecrest

When I looked at it I could see that it was a juvenile but I wanted to try for a better shot. The bird Wendy had been watching was an adult but they quickly moved off deep in the cover of the bushes, so we followed them. There was also **Goldcrests** in with them and we re-found them further along but had to go down a short track into the trees to get closer. Wendy had her camera raised in the hope that the bird she had her eye on would come out into the clear but it wasn't looking promising. I headed back up to the footpath with Lyca wondering what was keeping her. When Wendy emerged she was looking at her pics and deleting the worst ones, so I was a bit annoyed that she hadn't told me she was getting pics of Firecrests. I forgave her in the end because it'd turned out that every time a bird had come out into the clear it was a Goldcrest, so she'd stuck it out anyway hoping to better her existing Goldcrest shot, if nothing else. When she showed me her last pic she'd actually struck lucky and had her 1st ever Firecrest shot. It wasn't remotely what she'd hoped for but it was still visibly a Firecrest!



Firecrest

Even though there were signs telling people to keep their dogs on leads, there were 3 off the leads and heading straight for us. Lyca was looking like she was going to cause trouble, so we lead her off the path and down to some trees. We waited for them to pass only to discover that we were standing right next to a wasps nest :O. Needless to say we didn't stick around after that! The rain was mostly holding off, although there'd been a couple of light showers, so we chanced our luck and walked further up the footpath to find the Gazebo. The Gazebo was a platform in the woods, which overlooked the treetops and gave the best opportunity to see Purple-hairstreak Butterflies. Wendy reckoned it was far too windy and a complete waste of time but I wanted to go for a look anyway. While we were walking Wendy flinched and looked upwards, something had just narrowly missed her head.....What the? After thinking about what had just happened she cottoned on that there must've been an Assassination Squirrel up the tree dropping things on peoples heads, like at Wells Woods last year.

The footpath opened up into a huge field with a massive mansion house in it with its own private driveway. The public footpath turned left, away from the house and into the woods, obviously to keep the public at arms length.



Big house

By the time we'd climbed up a hill to reach the Gazebo we were already knackered, so the prospect of climbing up that too wasn't exactly enticing. The steps up to the platform on top were steep and with the strong wind and a shared fear of heights it wasn't a pleasant experience. When we finally reached the top, with legs like jelly, we admired the views surrounding us and as Wendy had predicted there were no Butterflies flying around the tree canopy.....Urrghhhhh!



Above the trees

It was so high up that we didn't feel particularly safe up there in the wind and when there were a couple of very strong gusts, which felt like they'd blow us over, we decided to go back down to the safety of terra firma. A family group, with young kids, appeared and went up after us and totally made our efforts look feeble. There were Dragonflies everywhere, so we stopped to try for some pics, finding 2x **Yellow Shell Moths** in the long grass. There was absolutely no sign of any Purple Hairstreaks, so we headed back to the car.

We had to go through a field of Cows, which Lyca was very interested in and by then it was boiling! When we got back to the path we had another look for Firecrests but they'd gone and we added **Coal Tit** to our list. We went for a look at the feeders behind a screen, as they're meant to bring in Marsh Tit and instead found **Great Tit**. Typically there was no sign any Marsh Tits and we hadn't heard one on our walk either. Back at the car it was 5.53pm and still lovely and sunny, so it felt a shame to go home but we were knackered. We'd made good use of the day and had even worked around the dodgy weather apart from our thorough soaking at Titchwell earlier.

At 5.53pm we were back at HQ and after Wendy had fed Lyca we started to rustle up our tea. Mine was fresh Pasta, so was nice and quick while Wendy had to make a stir-fry from scratch.....Hahahahaha! I'd finished mine by the time she sat down to eat hers and I'd already decided earlier that I'd head out to Cley for a bit that evening. Lyca wouldn't be allowed at Cley and I wanted to go to the hides to see what was about and hopefully take some pics. Wendy stayed in with her and was looking forward to a nice long bath anyway, so everyone was happy.

Even though it was a 20min drive away I arrived at Cley at 7.06pm. I wanted to park in the small layby off the road, as it's much closer to the hides but it looked like everyone else had the same idea and it was rammed.....Urrgghhhh! I headed back to the main car park and had to walk the longer way to the hides. This meant that I was closer to the worst hide, so I nipped in for a quick look. This turned out to be a stupid idea, as there was nothing in front of it, the sun was in my face and I could see 18 Spoonbill right in front of the better hides. Aarrghhhhh! I packed up quickly and walked quickly round to the others and having expected these hides to be full, due to the amount of cars, the one looking over Pat's Pool only had a few people in it.....Ace. I sat down and typically the Spoonbills had moved further away by then but I still managed a shot I was happy with, aided by the low evening sunlight.



Spoonbill

From the hide I spotted **Sand Martin, Canada Goose, Wigeon, Common Gull** and a nice **Little Ringed Plover**, which pleased me no end when it walked right in front of the hide to allow me to get my best LRP shot ever :).



Little Ringed Plover

Before I'd gone to Cley I'd seen reports of a Caspian Gull coming into roost most evenings, so I set about checking them all, as Caspian would be a lifer. After going through the hundreds of Gulls one by one the best I could come up with was a **Yellow-legged Gull**, which wasn't bad but not a lifer. I noticed that there were more Gulls roosting outside Dauke's Hide, so I quickly moved. It was chocka block, so I had a very quick scan but saw nothing that caught my eye. I didn't like the overly serious atmosphere in there, so I got out as quickly as possible! I left at 8.50pm and when I arrived back to HQ at 9.08pm I got a report of 3x Garganey at Cley.....Doh! I hadn't seen anything remotely like a Garganey the whole time I was there!

Wendy had cheered herself up by bringing some Lavender in from the garden and putting it in a jar she'd found under the sink. After I'd finally put my feet up and watched a bit of TV we were all ready for bed at 10.50pm.

Monday 11th August

At 7.55am we were all awake and peering out of the window it was another sunny day but still very windy. I used the large garden to do my 1st practice badminton moves after my knee op, which went well and I had no pain. I was looking forward to finally going back to play later in the month after a 3yr absence due to my knee injury. While we had a relaxed start to the day Lyca had other ideas and was barking at just about anything or everything. The neighbours going past the window to pack up their cars became her main focus, so I shut the blind so she couldn't see them to try and shut her up. She was in one of those moods, which would probably last for the day! Wendy had been busy making sarnies for lunch and after we'd both put sun cream on we were finally ready to go at 10.05am.

Our 1st stop was Holt Country Park where we'd gone last summer for Silver-washed Fritillary. There was a Dragonfly pool and a section of footpath, which was covered in brambles and caked in Butterflies of many different types. We'd been spoilt for choice there and had taken 100's of pics, so even though we were a few weeks later we still thought it'd be worth another visit. We arrived at 10.17am and walked over to the Visitor Centre, as I wanted an ice cream. When we got there it was closed, which seemed a bit odd given the time and the fact

that it was the summer holidays and very busy. My heart sank when I found out that there'd be no ice cream and I'm sure I wasn't the only one. The Buddleia outside it was covered in **Silver-washed Fritillaries** and we stopped for some pics but were disappointed to find that the majority of them were past their best and looking decidedly tatty and this was my best shot.



Silver-washed Fritillary

Amongst them was a more rare form called **Valezina**, which we'd never seen before and certainly weren't on the reports board last time. Apparently 15% of females, in southern areas are Valezina, which are a dull brown colour instead of the normal bright orange. We stopped for some pics but were disappointed to find that the majority of them were even worse looking!

There were **Peacock Butterflies** amongst them and Common Darter Dragonflies flying around. Lyca was being naughty and barking at everyone, so she wasn't getting the attention she'd been used to. One woman even said, "Who got out of their basket the wrong side this morning?" which was slightly embarrassing. Wendy ended up with a nice shot of a Common Darter to make up for not getting anything else.



Common Darter

We headed over to the footpath and found that there were absolutely no flowers in the hedge, which meant no Butterflies! This was a huge contrast to last year but would explain why there was so many on the buddleia, as it was probably the only thing left for them to feed on. It wasn't long before we'd found the Tit flock, which had Goldcrest and Nuthatch in with them but disappointingly no Treecreeper :(There were Migrant Hawkers and Common Darters, as well as **Speckled Wood** and **Comma Butterflies**. When we tried for some shots of the Comma we found that it had a hole in its wing, so we gave up. We ended up getting a bit lost trying to find the Dragonfly pond but I managed to get my bearings when we came out onto the dry Heathland area, where we'd had Keeled Skimmer Dragonflies last year. It's also a well-known spot for Adders, so we kept our eyes peeled. We didn't see any, which was probably a good thing with Lyca being with us but we found a **Graying** Butterfly to add to our list. Typically, as we approached the Dragonfly pool, the sun went behind the clouds and there wasn't an insect in sight. We hung around until it appeared again, which was a good move, as they all started flying and we even found a nice **Ruddy Darter**. We stopped for some pics and eventually sat down next to its favourite landing spot and got some shots. Wendy got the best one but that's only because she doesn't have dodgy knees and could get down lower than me :P.



Ruddy Darter

A guy with 2 kids had joined us and he was wielding a camera and a Butterfly net. We presumed he was taking his kids for some outdoors summer holiday activities and was teaching them about Dragonflies. He exchanged a few words with us and we could tell that he fancied himself as a bit of an expert (not to mention comedian), so we carried on with what we were doing. A few minutes later his son came over to us holding a wriggling Migrant Hawker between his thumb and forefinger. He asked me did a want to take a photo of it to which I grumpily said, "No thanks!" The last thing I wanted was a pic of a Dragonfly being squished between someone's fingers plus I wasn't impressed with it being handled for no reason either. "It's a Southern Migrant Hawker!" he announced cockily, which would've been an amazing find according to my book and only the 2nd record for Britain! Wendy, being a bit more friendly asked him, "How long have you been doing this for?" to which he replied, "Since I was eight!" Wendy paused for a second and out of interest asked, "How old are you now?" The kid told her that he was now 12, like as if he'd been doing it for donkey's years. It was of course nice of him to show us the specimen and also that his Dad was taking him out and teaching him about nature, although we're not sure how his reliable his information is. We're very much of the belief that you should be able to enjoy seeing things without having to hold them in the hand though but that's only our opinion. When Wendy's back started protesting that it'd taken more than enough abuse from taking pics we packed up and went back to the car.

It was 12.45pm when we got back, so we reckoned it was as good time as any to stop for lunch. We left at 1.11pm and headed to our next stop, which wasn't far away either.

It shouldn't have taken us long to get there but my Sat Nav took us to the wrong car park, so after I'd got back on track and I'd driven down a ½ mile driveway we arrived at The National trust's Felbrigg Hall, another new place for us. Just as we arrived at 1.42pm the heavens opened again.....Grrrrrrrr! Luckily it was only another quick shower but we realized that yet again we didn't have any coinage for the car park. We left the car in the car park and wandered over to the gift shop to get some change. Wendy went in and had a look round for some pressies 1st but obviously she'd have to buy anything on the way back. After that she went up to the counter and asked the lady behind it if she could give her some change from a £20 note and explained our predicament. The woman next to her was serving a customer and had the till open, so she thought it wouldn't be a problem.....simple! How wrong was she? The woman looked horrified and after

umming and arring she said that she'd have to go and ask someone and disappeared out the back. She came back with another lady who also looked horrified and basically told her that under no circumstances could they do it. Wendy was pretty annoyed by the whole situation and if that'd been the only shop around, they'd have just lost themselves 2 visitors. Considering it was £10 each to go into the Hall itself and £5 each to enter the walled garden they'd potentially just lost £30, not to mention money we might've spent in the Café and shop! Ridiculous! Luckily Wendy went across to the Café and bought a drink, so in the end we had enough change to pay for our ticket. I ran back to the car to sort it and when I returned Wendy was outside chatting to a nice lady who was admiring Lyca and asking what breed she was. She said that she could see the Cocker Spaniel in her and reckoned she had the same naughty traits as her 2 Cockers.....Hahahahaha!



Felbrigg Hall

We wandered out into the grounds of Felbrigg Hall and found the footpath, which lead to the lake, where we were hoping to find a lifer. It was certainly a popular place and there were people everywhere. The sky was looking dodgy but we didn't expect it to be too bad if it rained but that wasn't our main problem. Having not done very much research beforehand I wasn't particularly clued up on as to where to look for our lifer.....Doh! Ah well, we'd just have to wing it and see what happened. The walk was a pleasant one and after we'd cleared the Hall we found ourselves in a meadow area, which was full of wild flowers and Bumble Bees. We came to a small bridge over a stream called Scarrow Beck which feeds Felbrigg Lake and looked good for what we were after.....or did it? There was nothing flying about over the water or resting on the long grass either side, so we moved off. The next section was through some trees and I spotted a **Stock Dove** sitting motionless in a hole in the tree right in front of us. Wendy stopped for pic, which was tricky, as it was so dark in there and the bird was so close it was hard to get far enough away from it to get it all in the frame.



Stock Dove

We came to the end of the woods and could see the huge lake ahead of us, so we headed straight for it. This was looking more like it! The sun had gone in again so there didn't look like there was much happening. On 2nd glances we found some Damselflies resting on a dead branch protruding from the water. It was so dark that they were all just black silhouettes as far as we could see. We carried on looking through them all and Wendy was certain that she'd caught a quick glimpse of red eyes on one of them. All of a sudden the heavens opened again, so we ran back to shelter under the trees until it stopped. As soon as it had passed over the sun came out again and with it loads of Damselflies. They were literally everywhere you looked, flying over the water, resting on the wall and the grass around the lake as well as all over the stick in the water. We didn't know where to start!



Felbrigg Lake

Looking through all the Common Blue Damselflies was no easy task but eventually one caught our eye, which appeared to have red eyes. I grabbed a quick record shot and sure enough it did. Wendy had stupidly left her iphone back at home in the IOM, so we didn't have her ID apps to refer to on this trip. She won't be making that mistake again.....Doh! We weren't entirely sure whether they were Small Red-eyed or Red-eyed but going by what I'd learned I

reckoned that they were **Small Red-eyed Damselflies**, which was a lifer for us both. They were all flying around frantically and were difficult to get in our bins never mind our cameras! There was a pair mating and we noticed that they were going up into the trees to rest unlike the others. Interestingly all the Common Blues were males apart from 1x female which was in the water surrounded by the males who were all trying to mate with her! We spent ages trying to get pics of the Small Red-eyed and after a while they started to settle on the wall with the others. When at rest their abdomens were slightly upcurved, which was very obvious compared to the blues. From the 100's of blue's Wendy counted 7 red-eyed in total but there could easily have been a few more flying over the water. This was the best shot I ended up with.



Small Red-eyed Damselfly

After getting some better shots I had all the info I needed to confirm my ID and we both came away with some good pics. All of a sudden Wendy started to laugh and pointed at my pocket, I had a **Common Rustic Moth** sitting at the entrance to it! A Eurofighter went over and after that we called it a day and started to walk back.

Wendy asked me why we were walking away from the Hall and hadn't taken the short cut up the field heading towards it like everyone else. Eh? I hadn't even seen anyone walking through the field! I was following the footpath but Wendy was adamant that we were going the wrong way. We carried on and on and on but the turning to send us back towards the Hall wasn't appearing. We were indeed walking away from where we wanted to be but we'd gone too far to turn back, so we carried on. To cut a long story short we'd definitely gone the long way back but it was a nice walk, so we couldn't grumble. When we were finally approaching the Hall we couldn't figure out how to get back via the quickest route. A couple of people in front of us had taken the path round an old Church but looking at the very conveniently placed map I reckoned that would be the long way, so we went straight ahead. We should've followed them and before long we'd lost the path and had to cut through a field of cows and then hit a locked and rickety looking wooden gate.....Urrghhhhh! Wendy guided Lyca under it and then followed suit but there was no way I was going to even try to squeeze through the narrow gap underneath. I just had to climb over it and as I did it swung on it's hinges but at least it didn't break and it provided us with some entertainment for the walk! Luckily the field took us to the cattle grid at

the entrance, so after a well deserved high five we were back on track. Before we left we made use of the WC's, which were in the courtyard through the old stables and Wendy went 1st while I stayed with Lyca.



Stables

After that she went back to the shop, where she bought a couple of pressies reluctantly after the change incident earlier. This time the woman was friendly and asked her if she'd enjoyed going round the Hall and Gardens but Wendy took great delight in telling her that we hadn't been in and had walked (for free) to the lake instead :P.



Waiting for Wendy

It was my turn next and when I came back I found Wendy chatting away to another Lyca admirer, she was certainly popular in Norfolk! Back at the car it was 4.43pm and 20c but we had no other plans and were starting to feel hungry, so it was time to head home.

Back at HQ it was 5pm and I had plans to go back to Titchwell that evening to try for that Spot Crake again. I was slightly put off by the fact that it was an hours drive away though....Urrghhhh! My beans and sausages on toast were ready in minutes, which made my mind up that I was going to make the effort and go. I just hoped that I wasn't going to regret it after going all that way. Wendy had decided to make a fresh Tomato Soup using her Mum's tomatoes and some of the

fresh herbs from the garden and she was still waiting for it to cook when I left....Hahahahaha!

I set off for Titchwell at 6pm and after a long uneventful drive I arrived at 6.53pm. I headed straight for the Island Hide, which looks over the edge of the Fresh Marsh where I presumed the Spotted Crake was being seen. There was 1 other bloke with a camera looking at the edges of the reeds, so I guessed I was in the right place. Suddenly 4 people came bursting in and within seconds I realized the 2 men and 2 women were EXTREMELY posh. After sitting down for about 30secs one man came marching over to the photographer next to me and said loudly, "What are these things just here?" The photographer said, "Err Black-tailed Godwits." The posh man replied with, "Oh!" and marched back to proudly tell the others like he knew what he was on about. Seconds later he was back and this time I was his victim. "You there, what's the black thing out there, just there!" I replied in an annoyed voice, "Moorhen" and again he trotted off happy. This time he stayed put with his party.....Phew! They provided me with some good entertainment while I waited. One of the women loudly exclaimed, "Black-headed Tern, look you can see it, it has a black head!" I presumed she was talking about the 500 Sandwich Terns that were out on an Island in the middle. She then said to the others how much she'd love to see Yellow Bunting again. She must've meant Yellowhammer, so could only assume that in their massive Mansion House they have a library with 20 Volumes of Darwin's British Birds or something from 1900. They hadn't finished yet though and the man came back asking if the tide was in. The other photographer took time out to explain that he was looking at the fresh water pool, the next one along was brackish then after that was the Saltmarsh where the tide comes in. Happy with that he yet again went off and explained it all to the others like he was the fountain of knowledge. Not once did he say, "Thanks for the info." Typical! Finally and top it all off he said to the others, "Oooo I wonder who lives in that house over there it looks very exposed?" The other posh bloke who was a lot quieter said, "I believe that's the other hide." Hahaha brilliant.....he was talking about the Parrinder Hide! :P. This did interest Posh bloke number 1 though and they all decided to march off. When they left I gave the photographer a look as if to say, "What on earth?" and he just looked back at me with a face that said, "I have no idea!"

In all that time the Spotted Crake hadn't appeared, so I checked my phone and saw that the last reported of it had been at about 3pm in the afternoon, so surely it was still about? A lady came in and sat down quietly who knew the other photographer, so they started to have a chat. Within about 1min of that I spotted a Moorhen then another bird appear out of the reeds. I got my bins on it and was just about to tell the others when the other photographer said, "There it is!" Sure enough the **Spotted Crake** had finally put in an appearance, a lifer for me! I quickly got some shots off but straight away it got scared and ran back into the reeds flapping its wings like a right little pansy.



Spotted Crake

Still, all the time and effort had definitely been worth it. All 3 of us had a bit of a chat afterwards and I couldn't believe how lucky the lady was, she'd literally been there a minute! After scanning the rest of the pool and realizing there was nothing else new about I decided it was time to head home. As I left the hide a **Turnstone** flew over, which was a bit nuts! I left the car park at 8.20pm and as I was driving east I saw some lightning strike directly over where HQ was! Uh Oh Wendy hates Storms and Lyca isn't a fan either, so I put my foot down expecting to find the pair of them quivering in a corner when I got back. The closer I got to Weybourne I realized that the storm had moved further east and away from HQ but the roads were soaked, so it must have taken a hammering?

I got home at 9.10pm and the 1st thing I wanted to know was how bad the storm had been over the cottage. When I asked Wendy, she looked blank and said, "What storm?" which really surprised me. I was convinced it'd gone right over her. Apparently it'd chucked it down with rain but there'd been no thunder and lightning.....Weird! I flicked through my pics of the Spot Crake and showed Wendy on the back of my camera, so having no idea still that I'd seen it her eyes nearly popped out of her head and she groaned, as she was properly gripped off :P. When I told her I'd only seen it for about 3secs after all the time I'd put in it lessened the blow though. By 11pm we were tired so headed off to bed.

Tuesday 12th August

It was 7.15am when we woke up and it was another sunny but windy day. The bin in the kitchen was full as was the recycling but we had no idea where the wheelie bins were outside. I went out to investigate and saw a **Greenfinch** in the garden but failed to find the bins. Wendy went out for a look and finally found them next to the road behind the hedge.....Sorted! After we'd had breakfast and Wendy had made our sarnies we packed up and headed out at 9.48pm for our longest trip of the holiday. Although since the HQ was the furthest east it meant this journey would be a bit shorter than normal.

Unfortunately, having thought I knew where I was going, I went the wrong way at some lights and ended up having to go through Aylesham! A flat bed drove past us and spat a load of stones all over my car, which actually chipped my

windscreen! My poor car had really taking a battering over the past couple of weeks :(.

We arrived at the layby outside the Church in Potter Heigham at 10.37am only to find that there were no parking spaces left. I found a space further up the road in a layby next to the Cemetery and we started walking towards the footpath to Rush Hill Scrape. The last time we'd attempted this walk we'd got so far and had to turn back because the footpath had been damaged by flooding and was closed. I'd been wanting to go back ever since, so I'd planned to do it this time round, especially as it was the closest we could get to NWT Hickling Broad Reserve and we couldn't go there because they don't allow Dogs :(.

Last time we'd been harassed by wasps all the way up the 1st section of footpath but this time we didn't see any, although if we'd been a month later we could see it'd be bad. Just before the woods we found Brown Hawkers zooming around over the hedge. We came out the other side of the woods and straight after saying how we hadn't seen any yet we spotted an **Emerald Damselfly**, which landed in the long grass next to a ditch.



Damselfly Ditch

Further up the path we found ourselves surrounded by reeds and it started to feel like we were in the Broads. We spotted a large Dragonfly flying around, which we hoped would be a Scarce Chaser but when it landed and we got it in our bins we could see it was a **Black-tailed Skimmer**. A Scarce Chaser would've been a lifer for us both but we stopped for some pics anyway and Wendy ended up with this shot.



Black-tailed Skimmer

Carrying on up the path towards the scrape Wendy cursed as she brushed off a Horsefly from her arm. There was a notice up about the Konik Ponies, which graze the area and explained everything.....Grrrrrrr!

When we found the hide, which looked over the scrape our hearts sank when we saw 3x elderly ladies already sitting inside it. We'd been looking forward to putting our feet up while we looked for a reported Wood Sand and a Great White Egret. They kept peering out at us while they sat eating sarnies and drinking tea from a flask and looked as though they were there for the day. We didn't want to spoil their private party, so we stayed outside and tried to get a view over the long reeds in front of us. The scrape itself was miles away and all the waders were typically right at the back, so it was impossible to pick out a Wood Sand from them.



Rush Hill Scrape (in the distance)

We kept thinking we had it but when I took a record shot and zoomed in the bird looked more like a Ruff. They were all just so far away it was hopeless but we found the Great White Egret sitting hunched up against the reeds but it was miles away. I grabbed a record shot, which is the only photo I have of a GWE!



Great White Egret

This was the 2nd of these birds we'd seen on this trip and only Wendy's 3rd and my 4th ever. There did seem to be a lot of them around in the UK that week though. Up until then we'd presumed that we hadn't seen any Gatekeeper Butterflies and had dismissed all the dull brown ones as Meadow Brown. It wasn't until Wendy had a good look at one Meadow Brown and noticed that it was actually a very washed out **Gatekeeper Butterfly** that we realized we'd seen loads.....Doh! It's funny when you're in the Broads because you can't see any of the waterways through the reeds but you can see the sails of the boats travelling on it so it looks like they're sailing over land.



Eh?

We decided to do a loop walk on the public footpath instead of going back on ourselves and found a **Blue-tailed Damselfly** and wondered why we hadn't seen any China Mark Moths. We were in prime habitat for them, so we kept our eyes peeled. I'd also noticed that we should've but we hadn't seen any Southern Hawkers either. Funnily enough and bang on cue a Hawker landed in the reeds and we checked it out. It was a **Southern Hawker**, so we couldn't resist stopping for pics. It had landed behind a load of vegetation, so with the wind

blowing it wasn't easy to get a clear shot at all but Wendy ended up with the best one in the end.



Southern Hawker

A couple appeared from round a corner with a familiar looking dog, so Wendy said with a big smile on her face, "Is it?" and the woman laughed and said, "It is!" It was a 2½yr old male Apricot Cockerpoo and Lyca instantly took a shine to him.



Friends

They obviously wanted to play, so Wendy told me to let her off her lead. I did and the pair of them spent the next 10mins chasing each other, Cockerpoo style, like a pair of nutters! They got so carried away they were crashing into the couples legs and nearly knocking them over! Lyca was acting all submissive and rolling over onto her back when he jumped on her and it was a joy to watch. While they were having fun we all compared Cockerpoo notes as well as Norfolk v Highlands holidays and had a good laugh. I think they'd only stopped because they were tired and we had to tear Lyca away in the end :).

Further on we heard a **Sedge Warbler** and Wendy found out that it was a family with the adults coming in to feed the young. They were only a couple of feet

away from us but she could only just about make them out through the reeds. Next up we had a nice **Wall Butterfly** and we eventually found the turn in the path back to the car. Looking down it we wondered if it was doable, as it was totally overgrown but it was just grass, so we carried on.



Is this really a path?

Poor Lyca wasn't too sure especially when the nice soft grass she was ploughing through turned into spikey brambles and nettles! Having thought negotiating the old gate at Felbrigg the day before had been a challenge we certainly weren't prepared for what came next. We turned a corner to find a massive fallen tree, which lay right across the path! Wendy said "well that's that" and wanted to turn around but I was sure we could get through it somehow. There was no way around it, and I could see a route so Wendy went 1st to suss it out, ducking under and climbing over the huge branches. Eat your heart out Indiana Jones! Yet again being small had worked in her favour but it wasn't as simple for me. I had to leave my camera behind and carry Lyca through the worst of it before going back and doing it all over again with my heavy camera!



Assault course

It was hard going but Wendy found it really funny and thought that it'd made the walk more exciting. After we'd cleared the assault course section we walked alongside some pools where Lyca flushed a moth out from the grass. It landed on the underside of a leaf, so from that we knew it was a type of China Mark Moth

but we needed to see it properly to say which. When it flew again Wendy grabbed a shot and we confirmed **Beautiful China Mark**. Shortly after we had another, which looked different again and landed on my coat, so Wendy got another quick pic and we ID'd it as a **Brown China Mark**.



Brown China Mark

We then found ourselves on the home straight through the woods and could see the Church in the distance.....Phew! It'd been a much longer walk than we'd expected and we were starting to get hungry and needed a drink. The woods looked like they were well used by dog walkers and there was poo everywhere! I skillfully managed to stand in some despite Wendy exclaiming, "Poo!" and pointing at it....Grrrrrrrrrr! It took me ages to get it all out of the treads in my nice new GTX Hedgehog soles with a stick! It brought a whole new meaning to 'Pooh sticks' but I was really annoyed by that and just wish that people would pick it up!



Poo sticks!

At 1.50pm and not before time we were back at the car looking forward to sitting down and eating lunch. This wasn't happening straight away though because Wendy spotted a Moth in the hedge and called me over with my point and click

camera. I took a pic and it wasn't until I was putting the pic in this article that Wendy ID'd as a **Dusky Sallow** another new Moth for us!



Dusky Sallow

After we'd given Lyca a drink it was so late we decided to stay put for lunch instead of driving somewhere else, so we sat overlooking the Graveyard :/. Call me morbid but I couldn't help but notice the headstone of John Edmund Bensley, who'd 'accidentally drowned when on leave' 3months before WW1 ended. Wendy wondered if it was an accident or whether he'd committed suicide at the thought of having to go back! Who knows? Our lunch went down a treat as always and no wonder we were knackered! What was meant to be a short walk had turned into a 4.2mile hike and we still had another one planned!

It was 2.28pm when we got to the car park at Winterton (one of my favourite places in Norfolk) and while I sat in the car Wendy ran into the café for a Cappuccino and an ice cream for me. She'd heard the commotion from inside but had missed out on seeing an F15 doing maneuvers over the car park. She was gutted but I'd obviously seen the whole thing.....Cool! :). After we'd had our treats we left the car at 3pm and headed across the North Dunes and over to the Southern Emerald Pool we'd failed at last year in the pouring rain. There was a dirty big black cloud heading our way, which seems to happen every time we go to Winterton! Last time we'd got absolutely soaking and had failed to find what we'd gone for, apart from Wendy's last minute find of Forrester Moths. The area is also good for Adder and in the past I nearly stood on one when I was trying to have a wee, so we had to be careful with Lyca. Although we've been there loads of times we'd never done this particular route and found the Natterjack Toad pools for the 1st time.



Natterjack Toad pool

Most of them had dried up, which was surprising given the amount of recent rainfall but there was still a couple, that were full of water. While we were looking at it a lovely **Emperor Dragonfly** flew in briefly before vanishing for good. We found another pool further on which had a Damselfly resembling an Emerald but without Wendy's phone app we couldn't check it for Willow Emerald. We were pretty sure it was just a bog standard Emerald but took a record shot just in case. A bit further along I spotted a tatty looking **Painted Lady** Butterfly and got Wendy onto it. We then cut across the Dunes and onto the footpath where the 1st main pool is for Willow Emerald. When we got there it was totally dried up and overgrown, so we headed back out into the dunes to the other pool. I'd only seen the pool last year and had waded through the knee deep wet grass to get there only to find nothing. This time, although not as deep, the pool was visible and not nearly as overgrown, so we wandered over and had a scan.



Dragonfly pool

We hung around the edge and looked over the water finding another Emperor but nothing else. After a few minutes our eyes adjusted and we started to find the small Damsels resting on the sedges growing out of the water. One of them looked like a bit weird but was probably a teneral, so I got a record shot just to be on the safe side. Wendy sat down with Lyca and continued to scan letting out a squeak when she was bitten by some kind of fly!



Chilling

There was another Dragonfly, possible a Common Hawker (Winterton is one of the few places in Norfolk that gets the Hawker that we get in the Isle of Man), but it didn't land or stick around, so we never got a view of its features. As I wandered around restlessly Wendy called out, "Sparrowhawk!" but I couldn't see it for looking. "It's right over your head!" she shouted but I only caught sight of it as it flew off at 100mph! It wasn't looking good for Southern Emerald and we couldn't find anything other than the 3x Emeralds we'd already found, so we called it a day and headed back. We'd hoped we'd see some more Forrester Moths but I think we must've been too late for them as there was no sign of any. It would've been nice to have seen them flying around instead of lying low in the pouring rain and even better to have got some decent shots in better light but hey ho. The walk back took forever as always and in the same bush as we'd seen one in last year was a Yellowhammer singing its heart out. Nearing the car park we had our 1st **Skylark** of the trip and we finally flopped into the car at 5.20pm.....Phew!

We were already tired from our 4.2mile walk to Rush Hill Scrape but we'd just clocked up another 3.2miles. That wasn't taking into account the extra distance covered by going off track and wandering around either, so we were well and truly pooped, as was Lyca. It was a good excuse to go out for tea though and I'd found a Pub nearby using a Doggy Pub app on my phone.....Sorted :).

At 5.28pm I pulled up outside The Lion but it looked a bit rough. When Wendy read the sign saying food was served between 6-9pm we weren't exactly gutted and weren't prepared to sit around waiting till 6pm. We carried on to The Kings Arms in Martham but it was closed and didn't look very inviting either, so we carried on seeing a dead Grey Squirrel in the road. Our next stop was at Tesco where Wendy ran in to get another Pukka Pad for her notes, as the one she was using only had 1 page left. She'd looked in other shops but none of the ones she'd found were the right size to fit in her pocket or had perforated pages. It seemed like overkill but she was only gone for a minute and came back with the exact pad she wanted. We were starting to get the impression that we'd be home before we'd found a nice looking pub and 1hr later we were already at Weybourne.....Hahahahahaha! The pub there wasn't dog friendly but we could take Lyca if we sat outside, so we'd pinpointed it as our last chance saloon. We approached The Ship at 6.38pm and just wanted some food quickly but to our horror there were no seats free outside.....Aarrghhhhhh! There was only one

thing for it and that was to drive past our HQ to the trusty Dunn Cow in Salthouse, which wasn't ideal and also a gamble because it's so popular.

When we arrived there were no parks available at all and outside the pub was chokka, so we didn't hold much hope of getting a seat inside. Luckily Wendy spotted someone pulling out of a space, so I spun round and grabbed it quickly. That was the 1st hurdle dealt with, it was just a case of getting a seat next. At 6.50pm we opened the door and peered into the bar only to find that it was absolutely heaving! It looked like we were going to have to go home and cook something after all but then I noticed that the table behind the door I was holding open was empty so I grabbed it.....Happy days :). Wendy went up to the bar, while I tried to contain Lyca's excitement, and ordered our drinks. The barman asked if she wanted food and explained that they were staggering the orders, as they were so busy. Wendy said it'd be fine and took a card for 7.15pm and sat back down to wait till then to order.



Pub dog

It was like waiting for paint to dry but at 7.15pm she leapt up and went up to the bar. I'd chosen the Beef Burger, which was dodgy as I'd never had a proper Beef Burger before, but Wendy had to request it without relish or salad. She'd gone for a typically poncey starter of warm summer salad consisting of Quinoa, Broad beans, Green beans, Spinach, Asparagus, Peas and Feta with a Yogurt and Cucumber dressing plus a side of chips.....Bahahahahaha! Despite all the hustle and bustle, not to mention the noise, Lyca was very well behaved and finally sat down nicely under the table. It was definitely the busiest we'd ever seen it and things got even noisier when the door opened and 2x girls, who were very posh sounding student types, walked in and sat down at the bar. They were obviously regulars who knew the younger bar staff and they certainly made their presence known. They were so loud and rowdy that they attracted a lot of attention from the other punters too and were getting daggers off some of the real posho's in there! Having observed them for a while Wendy reckoned that they were both off their heads and had taken something to, shall we say, enhance their evening if you get my drift! They were talking about going out later so it all seemed to fit. Our food arrived at 7.45pm, which was much later than we'd ever imagined it would be earlier on. It was really nice though and well worth the wait but I enjoyed mine so much that I had no room left for the Cheesecake I'd already picked off the desert menu.....Booooo! Just before we left the loudest of the 2 girls came over to Wendy, who was writing some notes up, and said, "I'm very sorry if I was too loud and interrupted or ruined your meal!" What the.....?

Trying to keep a straight face Wendy replied, "No way, you're having fun, that's all that matters!" Hahahahahaha! We have no idea why she did it but Wendy reckons that maybe one of the staff had seen her writing notes and panicked that she was some kind of undercover inspector or something and had told her to apologise? Who knows? It had been an amusing end to a long day if nothing else!

We didn't get back to HQ until 8.30pm and after all the walking we'd done Wendy made a beeline for the bath. I thought I'd better start to tackle our pics for the 1st time since arriving, as we were running out of space on the memory cards. This actually took me until bedtime there were soooooo many! I put the moth trap out and Wendy went out for look to see how we were doing. There was already a Mother of Pearl as well as some others but worryingly she spotted a **Bat** flying around it.....Uh oh! Despite our long day we managed to stay up until 11.45pm and when we finally fell into bed all we could hear was the engine of the farmers combine harvester just over the road. He was obviously 'making hay while the sun shines' and we must've been tired because despite the flashing lights and noise it didn't bother us at all and we went out like lights! All we can say is that it's a good job a certain neighbour of ours wasn't staying there! ;P.

Wednesday 13th August

After sleeping like logs we were up at 7.45am to find that the wind had finally started to drop and it was sunny again. There were some dodgy clouds hanging around threatening to spoil it somewhat though. Obviously the 1st thing on the agenda was to see what the Moth trap had in store for us and when we went outside we could hear a Yellowhammer singing. I brought the trap in but we weren't impressed by our catch. The Mother of Pearl and other larger ones from last night had escaped and there wasn't much inside it at all. After potting the ones we didn't know to ID and letting the others go this was our list:

Macro's:

Single-dotted Wave x2

Silver Y x1

Large Yellow Underwing x4

Setaceous Hebrew x3

Common Rustic x3

Shuttle-shaped Dart x2

Six-striped Rustic x1

Flame Shoulder x5

Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing x4

Scalloped Oak x1

Small Square-spot 3

Willow Beauty x1

Micro's:

Light Brown Apple Moth x2 (m&f)

Brown House Moth x1

Catopria falsella x1

Shortly after we'd finished IDing them Wendy went outside seeing a **Song Thrush** and found in addition, on the wall of the cottage:

Scarce Footman x1

Treble-bar x1

Total = 36 (17sp)

As the Treble-bar was a lifer she couldn't resist a record shot!



Treble-bar

Ok so it wasn't as bad as it 1st appeared and we'd gained 5 new moths! Maybe that Bat did have something to do with the low count after all? Having wasted loads of time with moths we thought we'd better get a move on and packed up and headed out at 10.20am.

Ten minutes later I was parking up at Cley Visitors Centre and Wendy jumped out of the car to use the WC's and read the reports board inside. There'd been nothing of any interest reported on BirdGuides, so when she saw nothing on the board she wasn't surprised. We got our stuff out of the car and headed over the road to the East Bank with Lyca in tow. Dogs aren't allowed on the reserve itself but they're OK on some parts, so our plan was to walk down East Bank, along the beach, up West Bank and back to the car. Not only was it a nice, easy loop walk but we'd hopefully add Bearded Tit and Water Rail to our list from East Bank plus whatever else we might pick up from the beach or Eye Field as well.

We'd somehow managed to walk the entire length of the East Bank without hearing a single Beardy or Water Rail and having thought we could potentially have Cetti's there too, but we found nothing new at all.....Skillz! All that was around at Arnold's Marsh, was a load of Sarnies, it was dead! Great! Even though she'd managed to sneak her way into most of Wendy's photos already, she couldn't resist a holiday snap of Lyca standing by the sign on the shingle.



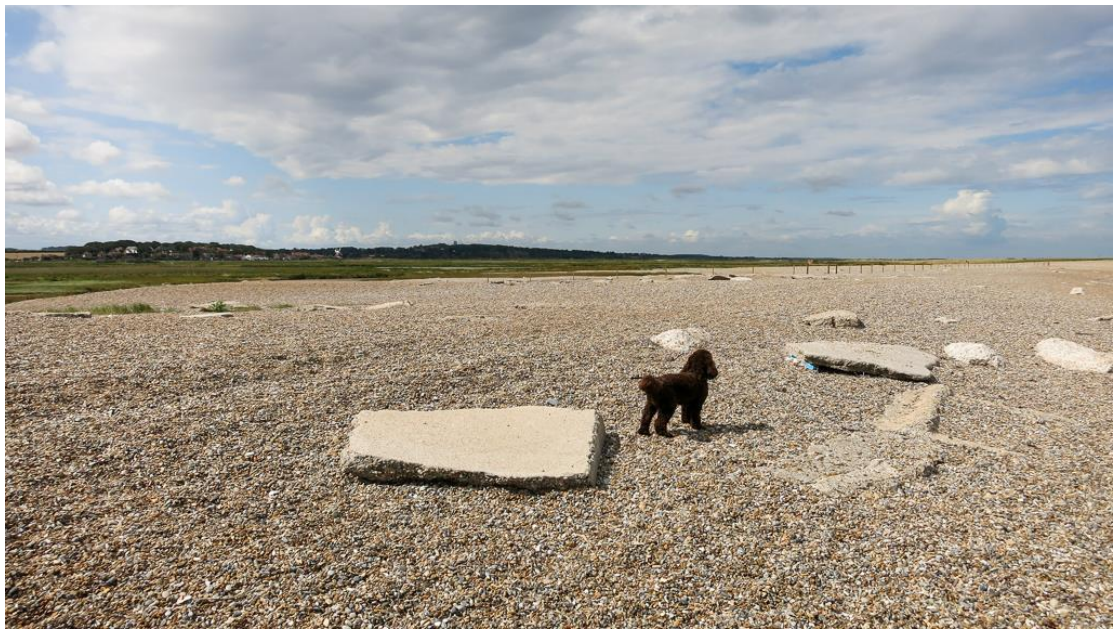
On my hols :P

Having already seen the mess at Cley I was interested to see Wendy's reaction. When we walked out onto the beach and the extent of the storm damage became apparent she was pretty shocked. We started to wonder if the lack of Beardies on East Bank was something to do with it as well, we should've heard at least one on our way down. There was a sign up explaining the situation and asking people to be careful.



Info board

We could see what it meant about the buried WW2 stuff and there were random bits of it all over the place.



Where's the ridge gone?

There was also a fenced off area where a Helicopter had crashed at the end of last year as well, just to add to the mess.

While Wendy was busy getting pics of the beach something caught my eye and I shouted, "Skua!" and raised my camera to try for a shot. Wendy thought she'd have a go at a record shot, as the bird was too far away for anything else. In all the excitement of seeing an **Arctic Skua** for the 1st time in probably over a year we both panicked. Wendy had forgotten to change her settings from earlier and I just messed all my shots up too.....Urrghhhhh! I was quite annoyed to put it mildly! As usual it flew straight past and didn't stop, so any hopes of having a 2nd chance were blown out the window. We carried on walking over to where North Hide used to be and saw the new screen, which had been built instead.



North Screen!

Our initial thoughts were that it'd be rubbish but in actual fact it worked in our favour, having Lyca with us. If the hide had still been there we wouldn't have been able to go inside with her, so we wouldn't be able to see the birds on the scrape at all. With the hide gone we were able to sit at the screen and view the birds without any problems. Saying that I mean apart from the fact that the birds there aren't really viewable anyway with them being so far away and the sun being behind them! There was meant to be Garganey and Wood Sand there but it was impossible to tell looking at all the black silhouettes out there. There were

4x Spoonbills asleep on an island and a flock of **Linnets** landed in the bush next to the entrance, so Wendy got up to try for a shot.



Linnet

After that we carried on to the coastguards hut where all the locals seawatch from. It had a damaged roof, the benches had gone and it was full of shingle from the surge of the storms.



Coastguard Hut

It was pretty dead looking out to sea so there was no point sticking around but out of interest I had a look at how much the car park was. Having walked from the Visitors Centre we didn't need to pay, which I felt quite smug about really. It was only £3.60 per day, which isn't much except for if you do what we normally do and only stay for an hour or so. We walked up West Bank without seeing anything new and back out onto the path by the road leading back to the car park. There was a new house in the row but it was a modern wooden building with lots of glass, which didn't fit in with the surroundings at all. New builds in Norfolk usually comply with the traditional style of the orange roof and stone

clad exterior walls and blend in very well. This one looked great but would've looked even better somewhere else, so I don't know how they got planning permission for it but I reckoned it was worth over £1million. I looked it up later and it was on the market for the bargain price of £1.5million! Kerching! :O.



Back at the car it 12.38pm, so we had our lunch and watched the comings and goings around us. Wendy wanted to go the Deli and shop in Blakeney to look for pressies, so that was our next port of call. I drove to Blakeney but there were no parks, so Wendy suggested I drove round the block and she'd meet me outside the Deli or up at the car park if I could get a space. With no reception on our mobiles there was no other way of doing it. I dropped her off outside the gift shop and drove off up the road luckily getting a space in the busy jcar park. I just hoped that she'd know to walk up to it and not stand outside the Deli to wait for me to spin past. She noticed a Butterfly in the buddleia outside the pub over the road and went to investigate. It was, as she suspected, a Painted Lady and she wished she had her camera with her. About 30mins later she emerged at the car park and found my car....Phew! She'd been ages although she had bought me a Pain au chocolat, which is now a tradition when she's in there.....Om nom nom :P. It turned out that some posh woman's credit card wasn't working in the Deli, so she'd had to stand in the queue waiting for them to sort it out. Some other customers had put their shopping down on the floor of the shop and walked out, which Wendy wasn't prepared to do. The poor woman behind the till looked very stressed and said that she hadn't been prepared for all the problems, which go with the job, when she'd applied. Seeing as we had to go back that way anyway next up it was Cley Deli for more shopping and again she was ages! The Deli was really busy and everyone in there was trying to decide what home made cake or pie they wanted, out of the huge selection at the counter, so it was slow going. By the time she came back to the car the wind had started to pick up again and there were black clouds rolling in. I wanted to go somewhere else, so we crossed our fingers it'd stay fine.

It was 2.15pm when I parked up at Kelling and as we set off down the footpath towards the water meadow it started to rain. Every year I say that we're never going back as it's always rubbish, yet every year we always go for a look. We stood sheltering under the hedge until the worst of it had passed over and carried on. By the time we reached the pool the sun was out and the sky was blue again, so we had a scan.



Kelling Water Meadow

There was a couple of **Green Sandpipers** and a group of about 8 Black-Tailed Godwits, a Little Egret and a young Grey Heron feeding at the waters edge. We watched them for a while until the Green Sands lifted and cleared right off, closely followed by the Blackwits. Straight after they'd gone another Blackwit flew in, which seems to be what happens there. It appears to attract birds in en-route but doesn't keep them there for long after they've had a feed. We carried on down the bramble-lined path through the fields watching Swallows, House Martins and **Sand Martins** zooming around. As we approached the beach Wendy stopped for some pics of some flowers so that she could ID them later. She'd often admired them but had never bothered to get any pics.

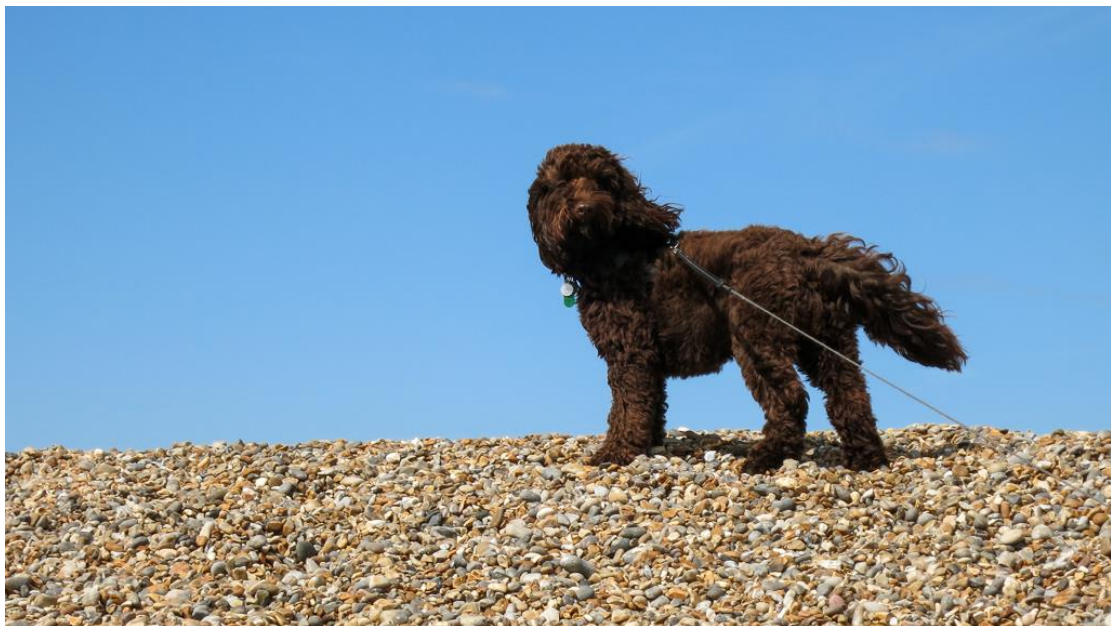


Common Toadflax



Field Bindweed

A bit further along where the fields joined the bottom of the shingle ridge we found a boardwalk lying in a heap. It'd obviously been washed up from somewhere after the storms and looked very much like one from Cley! We climbed up and over the ridge heading for the pillbox on the beach.



Poser!

We sat down on the shingle next to it and had a scan out to sea hoping for another Skua or something new for the trip. In reality all that seemed to be about was loads of Sarnies streaming past, so after a few minutes Wendy was bored. She decided to lie down and soak up some sun, while she had the chance and ended up having her 'stop the world' moment of the trip. She always manages to find a moment somewhere where she just wants to stop time and stay there forever and this was it.



Stop the clock!

I, on the other hand, had moved my position to up against the pillbox so I could rest my back and all of a sudden I got a whiff of poo..... :/. I told Wendy, who was so chilled just about managed to say, "Well move then?" I couldn't be bothered and stayed put thinking that it was probably coming from inside the pillbox, as I couldn't see any poo anywhere. Although it was pleasant sitting there no matter how hard we looked we couldn't find anything of interest, so Wendy reluctantly got herself back to reality and we stood up to set off back to the car. I had a quick check on the ground where I'd been sitting and was totally horrified when I spied the source of the smell that had been bothering me for ages. I'd made an impression in the stones where I'd been sitting and right in the middle of my bum and hand print was a ½ buried **human poo**.....Aarrghhhhhh! There was all of 2" either side of me and it, so I shrieked at Wendy to check all my clothes incase I'd sat in it. She could hardly move for laughing and miraculously they were still clean but all I wanted to do was get them off and put them in the wash! I'd been soooooooo lucky not to have put my hand in it and the thought of that was just sooooooo disgusting that I started to gag a bit! Wendy reckoned it was probably from a kid, as there was some rubbish lined up, which someone had been using as targets to throw stones at. The parents must've tried to bury it afterwards and done a very bad job or maybe it was just from some Birder who'd been caught short? Who knows but it was pretty gross however it got there. Thankfully, to take my mind off it for a couple of minutes, a couple of Eurofighters went over really high up in the sky.

Back at the water meadow Lyca was ahead of us on her Flexi-lead and she made a beeline for the fence. In doing so she flushed a wader from the edge of the pool which turned out to be a **Common Sandpiper**. It was nice to finally see something new for a change and looking on the far side of the pool there was actually 2 birds plus another Green Sandpiper. We then heard a call, which had us thinking for a minute before we spotted a **Greenshank** flying over. It goes to show that Kelling Water Meadow is the kind of place you'd have to spend a lot of time at to see what drops in during a day rather than just paying it a flying visit.



Moooo

We then had a **Whitethroat** diving into the Brambles further down the path and spotted a Dunlin on the pool in the corner of the field. It was 3.47pm when we got back to the car and luckily I didn't have poo on my trousers or I'd have had to take them off before getting in.

We stopped at the Shop/Deli at Weybourne for some milk on the way and were back at HQ at 4.10pm. The 1st thing on my agenda was to put all my clothes in the wash before I sat down and fell off a cliff. I was absolutely knackered and ended up falling asleep on the settee while Wendy was pottering about in the kitchen. Eventually she started to flag and was feeling the effects of our trip too. It's not as easy these days, since she's hit 40! :P. After a quick tea Wendy went to relax in the bath, while I chilled out as much as possible. She finally put her feet up at 7pm with a Rose Spritzer to watch some TV and speak to her Mum.

At 8.16pm I received an alert of a Franklin's Gull at Cley and then again at 8.34pm. Originally I'd planned to go out that evening but I'd been way too tired and couldn't be bothered in the end. It was tempting to change my plans as it would be a lifer for me and it was a smart adult. If HQ was closer to Cley I would've but I couldn't face a nearly 1hr round trip so decided against it. It sounded like it was coming in to roost, so might be back the next evening anyway. While I was going through my pics of the Yellow-legged Gull at Cley I came across one, which I had to look twice at and took me by complete surprise. I'd got a shot of the **Caspian Gull** that had been roosting there but I hadn't even realized I'd seen it at the time.....Hahahahahahaha! Lifer number 2 for me! After letting the moths from the fridge go I found the biggest spider ever on the stairs, it was practically the size of my handj, so had to catch it and put it outside.....Eeeeeek! Wendy then got right into the evacuation process and caught all the small ones from around the doors to let out too. Lyca was still very barky when she heard the neighbours next door but more worrying was that she'd developed a liking for the willow fence in the back garden. She was obsessed with removing the sticks, which had been woven together and looked nice, to take away and chew.....Uh oh! Wendyjh had 1st noticed her doing it the previous morning and had hoped she'd forget about but she hadn't and the garden was now strewn with bits of fence. We were so tired we ended up going to bed before 11pm again.....Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

Thursday 14th August

Looking outside when we got up at 7.15am it was the nicest start to the day since we'd arrived. It was sunny, hot and the wind had dropped right down. Wendy was ecstatic and couldn't wait to put her shorts on for the 1st time. It's just typical though that the weather had just started to pick up right at the end of the week. The Yellowhammer was singing outside again and it looked like it was going to be a very nice day indeed, although too hot by my standards. We were ready to go by 9.38am and headed off for our 1st stop Kelling Heath. Wendy was a bit concerned that on the one day she'd put shorts on we were going into prime Adder territory :P.

We arrived at 9.50am and after I'd read about a different route that was supposedly better for seeing Dartford Warblers I was keen to give it a go. We'd really hoped to bump into the guy we always meet there, especially after his appearance on Springwatch, but this move reduced our chances greatly. We've only ever really seen him out on the opposite side of the heath across the road and past the Railway track in the past. We set off in the opposite direction to normal and promptly got lost! After rounding a corner Wendy stopped dead in her tracks in front of me, turned around and scuttled back looking totally gob smacked.....What the..? "Guess who's round the corner?" she said. It was obvious who it was but really freaky considering we'd gone a different way. This had happened once before when we'd tried a different route and further fuelled Wendy's theory that he was The Ghost of Kelling Heath! It was too uncanny to be real! We finally bit the bullet and wandered over to say, "Hello!" again and Wendy joked about having seen him on TV. We chatted for a while and he was introduced to Lyca, which caused some amusement with him. He said he couldn't wait to tell his wife that he'd just met a Dog named after some Bins!

After catching up with everything that'd been going on at Kelling Heath he said he'd show us another good place for Dartfords, if we had the time. We accepted his kind offer and ended up getting a free 2hr guided tour and a fascinating insight into parts of the Heath we'd never seen before.



Looking down towards the sea

He told us that the Dartfords had been successful this year having raised 3x broods but that the Stonechats had completely vanished. He also told us that the Silver-studded Blue Butterflies had emerged 18 days early, so he'd had to put out a warning to everyone attending his Guided Tour that it may be lacking in Butterfly content. Sure enough on the day of the Tour he only managed to find 2 and they were both past it and very tatty specimens. We did a lot of chatting but

there was no sign of any of the Dartfords, Tree Pipits, Wood Larks or even Adders but it was an enjoyable 2hrs nevertheless. Out of interest, after worrying about it before we'd gone away, Wendy asked how bad it would be if Lyca was to be bitten by an Adder. Everyone she'd mentioned it to at home had looked at her as if she was mad but she was certain that it wouldn't be good. He backed her up and said that it would be a very serious matter indeed and that we'd have to take her straight to a vet, if we could get her there in time. He then told us that he knew of several Dogs that had died on the heath after being bitten.....O! We also mentioned Smooth Snakes and he said, "Oh yes we get them here, follow me if you have time?" So we obviously took him up on the offer. We hadn't got very far when he stopped and said it was a good place for Dartfords. Within seconds I saw a bird fly low over the heath with a long tail. I said "Oooo I think one's just flown past!" but where I saw it go and pointed to was behind where a Wren was perched singing. Wendy dismissed my sighting as a Wren.....Hmpfffff! We set off again and only got about 10 yards when Wendy and John's ears pricked up and he said, "Hold on there's one calling from back there!" Ha! I was vindicated, as it was exactly where I saw my bird fly too. We all stood and patiently waited until it called again, so we'd all heard a **Dartford Warbler** but now it was a case of getting a decent view. It was moving away from us deep in the gorse and so quickly that it didn't show even the tiniest flash of itself. The last time Wendy heard it was from behind us, so it'd managed to move all that distance totally unseen. Crafty or what? We were all a bit disappointed especially John (who we now know him as) who really wanted us to see something decent for a change.



Desperately trying to spot the Dartford Warbler

While we were talking about our visit to Kelling Water Meadows we mentioned the washed up boardwalk and how it looked like it had come from Cley. John said that it was indeed from Cley and that there'd also been parts of the North Hide found there too. That's a crazy thought, as they're probably 4miles apart or maybe even more! Further along Wendy saw 2x **Common Lizards** running for the cover of the bushes ahead of her. John showed us a weird plant called Common Dodder, which is parasitic and lives off other plants and also told us how to ID Western Gorse, which was in flower unlike the usual Gorse. He then said that unfortunately he had to go shopping and left us to it, although we rather suspect he'd have preferred to stay out on the Heath :P. After Wendy had written our address down for him, as he'd offered to send us a copy of Cley Bird Club Newsletter, we went our separate ways and joked that we'd probably bump into each other again in October. We couldn't believe it and he's obviously a man

of his word but two days after we were home we received the really interesting Newsletter.....Wow! While Wendy was otherwise engaged writing notes (as usual) I saw a bird flying over, which could've been a Turtle Dove but I didn't get enough details to be sure. She hadn't seen it at all, which wasn't much help.

We were back at the car at 12.35pm and Lyca had behaved impeccably, even with John around, which made a nice change. We ate our lunch and realized that time was running out and that we'd have to make a decision as to where to go after our next stop off. Wells Woods or Holkham Pines? Decisions decisions.....Urghhhhh! I'd ditched off some places to go to after Warham Fort for Chalkhill Blue Butterflies again but I still had too many options left. We started to wonder what exactly we'd done in the week and although we were knackered it didn't seem like much! OK we weren't getting up at stupid o'clock and leaving at the crack of dawn, we were having a chilled out start to the day with no alarm clocks in sight! Had it been the right time of year we would've been but Insects need the sun and heat to get them going so it pays off to go out later.....Nice ;).

Anyway, after we'd refueled it was 12.55pm, so we headed off to Warham Fort with Wendy moaning that she was feeling depressed about going home the next day. It was 1.20pm when I parked up in the layby for Warham Fort and there were some dubious looking black clouds looming overhead. As long as we didn't get caught in a thunderstorm like last year we'd be happy. We wandered down the footpath and unlike last year, when we were nearly stepping on them, there were no Chalkhills in sight, not even on the dog poo! We hoped this wasn't because they'd already gone and carried on into the field and headed towards the Fort. We didn't come across a single Butterfly until we actually got to the Fort itself when I spotted a Clouded Yellow. Not bad really, but it wasn't what we were after. Fortunately it didn't take too long to spot our 1st **Chalkhill Blue Butterfly** and looking around there were more.....Phew! They were mainly staying within the Fort, although there wasn't anywhere near the numbers we'd had last year and they were well past their best. The blue males were looking particularly tatty but the brown females were in better condition, which was just typical! Wendy stayed with Lyca and sat down in the sun while I went off with the camera to get some shots.



Chalkhill Blue

There was another Photographer already taking pics and we wondered why there'd been no one there last year when they were all in their prime? Maybe it was due to the thunderstorm and no one else had been mad enough to go out? The Photographers wife, or whatever she was, was sitting on the bank of the Fort looking incredibly bored. She had her head turned away from us and her hand shielding her face, presumably so nobody would approach her. By then more people had arrived and they all had a wander round the Fort, so we think that was their main reason for being there, rather than the Butterflies. I turned round to see that Wendy was trying to get pics while holding Lycas lead, so I thought I'd better go and give her a go. On the way back I spotted a cracking Painted lady so quickly nabbed my best shot of one of them too!



Painted Lady

Wendy had been watching the males chasing the females and noticed that some of them were still in pretty good nick but we were both disappointed with all our pics of the Chalkhills. A bonus came when Wendy came over to where I was following a Clouded Yellow and it actually stayed put to feed, so Wendy grabbed a shot before it flew. Luckily it landed again, so I had a go and having never imagined getting any shots of them ever we were both pretty chuffed and Wendy ended up with this shot.



Clouded Yellow

It was getting late by then and having eventually decided where our last place of the day was going to be, we plodded back to the car. Back at the car it was 3pm and Wendy was on a real downer, it was really feeling like the end now, but we tried not to think about it too much. We still had most of the next day in Norfolk before driving to Heysham, so we just hoped the weather was going to be OK.

We arrived at Holkham Pines at 3.18pm and it was as busy as ever. The car park was full and there were people with dogs everywhere. Lyca was going to be put to the test with so much going on and we didn't hold any hopes for her being good. As we walked up the drive everyone was admiring her and we were even stopped by 3 young girls, who wanted to know her breed, so she was loving all the attention. I'd spotted an ice cream van parked up at the top by the entrance, so obviously that was my 1st priority. I gave Wendy the money and she trotted over to the van and came back with my Whippy 99.....minus the pointy bit from the top :O. I wonder where that had gone? We did our usual walk down the footpath to the Washington Hide without even hearing a bird or seeing any different Butterflies. This came as no surprise though but we enjoyed the walk anyway. Instead of turning back we went up the boardwalk and back via the pines.



Holkham Pines

Lyca had great fun chasing the pinecones Wendy was kicking for her in the sand and hopefully it would tire her out for later. It was such a nice day Wendy really didn't want to go home but we'd been everywhere we wanted to and it was getting late. We had loads to do when we got back and cooking didn't seem like a good thing to have on the agenda, so we decided to grab some food on the way. Back at the car it was 4.20pm and when I checked my shoes I'd only gone and stood in dog poo again! After dragging my shoe through some long grass for what felt like ages we left and headed for the nearest petrol station.

On the way the sky turned black and the heavens opened again! It was so heavy that my windscreen wipers just weren't cutting the mustard and I could barely see! At least we'd spawnily managed to dodge the rain again while we'd been out walking AND had been lucky for the entire week considering.....Phew! Wendy was hoping to get some money out but I'd gone to the wrong garage and there wasn't a cash point inside but it didn't matter, she could get some from the Spa in Blakeney.

I parked up in the only space left on Blakeney Quay, which was very lucky and it was 5.17pm when we went into The King's Arms. I grabbed our usual seat over in the corner of the small bar, while Wendy went to get some drinks in. The 1st thing Lyca did was jump up onto the bench next to me, which I knew was a bit naughty. The old woman who'd been perched on the end of a table last time we'd been there was there again and shouted at us, "You'll get barred for that, Dogs have to be on leads and on the floor not the furniture, you'll be barred for life!" Oooooops! I quickly moved her back onto the floor and we made light of the whole situation. It turned out that they'd only just had all the benches reupholstered after they'd been flooded out by the storms last year, so fair enough. They'd also had to get a brand new wooden floor and kitchen fitted after it too. While Wendy was waiting for the drinks the old woman told her that if she wanted food she'd have to wait till 6pm unless she was ordering off the afternoon menu. This was a helpful tip off but we were starting to wonder if she was after a job there.....Hahahahahaha :P.

Wendy wasn't too impressed that I'd picked a seat in the local's bar and went out the back to see if there was room out there instead. There was, so we moved straight through and had the room to ourselves. Surely Lyca would settle down with nobody to distract her? I already knew what I wanted to eat before we'd even arrived and luckily it was still on the specials board but it did mean waiting

until 6pm. Wendy was having soup, so could've ordered hers straight away but I didn't fancy anything else. Lyca curled up on the floor under the table by Wendy and we sat patiently waiting for 6pm to come around.



Getting the hang of the Pub thing

Shortly after we'd sat down a couple with 2 young kids arrived and took the table opposite us. Lyca wasn't that bothered by them luckily and they weren't a problem. The family, were very posh and had ordered food off the afternoon menu, so were sitting eating in front of us while our stomachs rumbled! We could hardly keep our faces straight when they started talking to their kids who were tragically called.....Jonty and Noah! Poor kids!

Unbelievably we'd been jammy again because the Landlady told Wendy that there'd just been another thunderstorm but we'd been totally oblivious of it! Wendy was quite happy chilling out but I was bored and just wanted my tea, so when it got to 5.55pm I asked her if she was going to go and order. Now Wendy's no rule keeper and usually likes to bend them slightly but she was adamant that she wasn't going to order before 6pm, as she'd just look stupid, like she can't tell the time or something. I preferred to wind her up and say it was because she's a massive wuss :P. Eventually 5.58pm arrived and she went up to order our food, (hardcore or what?) making jokes with the Landlord about my order. I'd ordered the Tempura Chicken but with chips instead of wedges and absolutely NOOOOOOOO salad or vegetables.....Bleurrghhhh! They both thought it was highly amusing but, "Each to their own!" I say. The posh family, had already eaten theirs and were getting ready to go, so the Landlord came through to take their plates. He made some jokey comment about the kids not eating their veg and said, "I know someone else in here like you!" Ha ha ha very funny! The Dad of the kids was well under the thumb and didn't seem to be able to move without his wife's say so. He walked out with the oldest kid to get 'the van' while she sat with the youngest to wait for him to pull up outside the door to collect them. She spoke to us in the end and said that if she'd known it was dog friendly she'd have brought theirs in. Wendy asked her what kind of Dogs they had and when she said they were Staffies we were quite pleased that she hadn't. The kid, who'd been watching Lyca like a hawk wanted to say, "Hello" to her and came over sheepishly. Our food arrived, so the woman told him to leave us alone to eat our tea.....Phew! Straight after they'd gone a couple of really quiet blokes with what looked like their adopted son came in to take their place. I'd already made my mind up that I wanted pudding, so after we'd finished Wendy had to go back to the bar to order it and treated herself to another Spritzer. It went down a treat

and was the icing on the cake for me, I was well and truly stuffed! When we left Wendy ran up the road to Spa but came straight back empty handed, as the cash point was out of order....Typical!

By the time we got back to HQ it was 7.10pm, so Lyca must've been starving and needless to say she wolfed her dinner down in no time! The bloke from next door came home without his wife and kid, which in itself isn't unusual in the slightest. It was the fact that he was returning alone with a garden spade slung over his shoulder, which caught my eye. We wondered how long it would be before we spotted him being interviewed on the News a desperate and broken man, following the mysterious disappearance of his wife and daughter during their recent trip to Norfolk :P. It was still raining when we got back but while Wendy set about washing, cleaning and starting to pack up before our departure in the morning I decided that I had just enough energy to go and see if yesterday's Franklins Gull had returned. Although I doubted very much that I'd be lucky enough to get 3 lifers in one holiday!

I left at 7.28pm and was already tired....Hahahaha! I got to Cley at 7.45pm and this time got a space in the cool blokes layby. On the way round to the good hides I heard then saw a **Bearded Tit** fly over the path. Strangely the hides were all chocka with the locals including Penny Clarke who has helped us out in the past with some good info. She was with her mates though, so I decided to not say, "Hello" It was obvious why everyone was there, so we all set about going through the hundreds of roosting Gulls. The search wasn't helped by the constant stream of even more Gulls coming in then Marsh Harriers flying over, putting every single one of them back up. Urrgghhhh! Whilst going through the Gulls a **Water Rail** called, which I'd all but given up on hearing by then. I then over heard the locals having a discussion about the Collin's Bird Guide app that had just been released. I'd been waiting for it to come out so it was news to me :O! Penny Clarke said, "I'm not getting it, it's like 100 quid!" I thought, "Oh my god surely not, that's a ridiculous price!" Another bloke in the hide, who I don't think was a local, piped up and said, "It's 12.99." Penny disputed this and said, "No its not!" so the bloke produced his phone and proved it. I had a look on my phone and was properly annoyed to see that it wasn't available on Android. Grrrrrrr.....Stupid Android! It didn't matter, I'd just get it on my iPad later on, it'd definitely be worth it. Try as everyone might not one of us could find the Franklin's Gull and it finally became too dark to see, so I left disappointed. Walking out the hide I suddenly saw lightning striking the ground to the west, so I panicked and legged it all the way back to the car. As I was running I realized I hadn't heard any thunder at all. How weird. I later found out that the lightning was striking about 30-40miles away! It felt so strange being able to see stuff at such a distance, as back home you can't see anything more than 10miles away.

When I arrived back I was very surprised to find Wendy sitting on the settee chilling with a Rose Spritzer. When I asked her if she'd started the packing she replied with, "Nah, it can wait till the morning, it won't take long." This statement made we worry and I really hoped it wouldn't come back to bite us on the bum tomorrow. She told me that when she'd gone outside with Lyca she'd heard the 1st **Tawny Owl** calling nearby, so she was pretty chuffed. I sat down and started looking into things to do the next day but there was absolutely nothing about to hit on our way out of Norfolk, apart from Great White Egrets! Not only that but the forecast was looking bad until much later in the day, so we didn't see the point in leaving at the crack of dawn either. We'd already decided that we were going to find a dog friendly pub in North Yorkshire to end the day with. Wendy absolutely loves it up there, I'd never been and it wasn't far from Heysham, so it made perfect sense. Using the 'Doggy Pub' app I pinpointed 2

appealing pubs, The Wheatsheaf in Ingleton or The New Inn in Clapham to aim for and was assured they were both in a nice area. All we could hope for was that we'd get there while it was still light, so I could see for myself what a lovely part of the world it is. By 11.40pm we were totally zonked, so headed off to bed for the last time at the cottage :(.

Friday 15th August

At 7.45am we woke up and instantly felt depressed that it was time to leave and the end of the holiday :(.

Unfortunately Wendy's decision to leave the packing the night before had been a bad one and coupled with the cleaning etc. it made for a very slow start indeed....Doh! There was a **Dunnock** in the garden when I let Lyca out, which was our 1st of our trip! We'd planned to go back to Sheringham Park for a last ditch attempt at finding a photographable Firecrest but time was ticking and we had to be leaving HQ by 12pm at the latest. We'd had to book it Saturday-Saturday so although in theory we could've had left our stuff there all day we needed to start working our way out of Norfolk as soon as possible.

Having broken the back of the packing and cleaning we thought it was safe to head out at 10.53am and despite the bad forecast it was sunny and hot. Four minutes later I pulled up in the Sheringham Park car park and we ambled down the path towards the Rhododendrons. Unlike last time we didn't even hear a Goldcrest never mind a Firecrest! The trees were all very quiet and there was literally nothing about. Lyca was misbehaving again and barking at every dog that approached us. She seemed OK with a couple of very cute Pugs though and Wendy stopped for a chat with their owners. They seemed rather taken by Lyca too, despite her initial bad behaviour! Surprisingly she wasn't bothered at all by a Squirrel running across the path ahead of us and then we spotted a familiar looking dog. A guy was heading our way with another Apricot Cockerpoo, which had been the only colour we'd seen during the week. We got chatting and compared notes about the breed and yet again he agreed that they're definitely strong willed and stubborn dogs. This seems to be the general feedback we get from everyone we meet, although they all agree that they're lovely natured. His dog was an F2, which is when both parents are Cockerpoos instead of the poodle/spaniel cross. He was a lovely dog and his owner said he'd been in Scruffts, just for fun and had misbehaved the whole time. Lyca got on really well with him, which is the same story with all the other Cockerpoos we meet. Apart from that, our visit to Sheringham Park had been a total waste of time, which would've been put to better use back at HQ.

We were back at 11.53am and after getting everything loaded into the car and emptying the bins we reluctantly shut the door for the last time at 12.22pm :(.

We waved "Goodbye" to what had been a great HQ and made a mental note that we'd definitely consider going back there in the future.



Brilliant HQ

Approaching Cley there was an obvious problem with the traffic and we could see a long line of cars at a stand still. It was on the narrowest section of road, so we weren't surprised but with limited time we just wondered, "Why now?" There were a lot of people standing in the road down by The George Pub, so we thought there might've been some sort of crash?



Stuck!

We were going nowhere fast but I'd given the car in front of me room to back up to at least release 3 of the stuck cars on the opposite side. I presumed he'd have the good sense to do just that but he didn't budge until a guy got out of his car and marched down to the car driver and told him to! Hahahahaha! After everyone, including us, had turned around we headed for the back roads and hit Morston at 1.01pm, which would normally only take us 20mins from HQ! There was a Spratt's Coach ahead of us and we ended up getting stuck behind that too, so our progress was slower than if we were travelling on Snail-back! I realized that the Coach was probably the cause of the problems in Cley, as there's no way it should've been on the coast road, it's far too narrow in places. I was dreading going through Stiffkey, as it's much narrower and sure enough the same thing happened there. Again I stayed well back, as did the car in front but the Coach driver wouldn't reverse at all and if he had the jam would've been sorted in a jiffy. Instead two cars on the opposite side had to do 20point maneuvers to get out of his way. What a rubbish driver.....Grrrrrrr! I stopped at Burnham

Deepdale Garage, so that Wendy could go in to look for a cash machine. There was a gorgeous little Cockerpoo Puppy tied up outside, which looked just like Lyca did when she was tiny, so Wendy couldn't resist making a huge fuss of it. The only difference was that it was nice and calm and very well behaved! It was the 1st chocolate colour Cockerpoo we'd seen in Norfolk, whereas at home they're common as muck.

After all our hold ups we finally arrived at the Choseley field we'd attempted on our way into Norfolk. It'd been pouring with rain the 1st time and we'd found nothing but this time the sun was out, so it looked promising, unless we were too late. We left Lyca in the car while we wandered around the field edge looking at the ground and yes, Wendy had her trousers on this time!



Chosely field

It wasn't long before we found 2x Clouded Yellow Butterflies but they certainly weren't around in the huge numbers I'd read about the week before. We were just about to give up when I found the 2nd thing on our list, a small **Latticed Heath Moth**.....Phew! It was a lifer for us and typically we'd left the cameras in the car, so Wendy took a quick point and click record shot.



Mission accomplished, albeit on our 2nd attempt, we went back to the car and realized that it was lunchtime already. We ate our sarnies parked up opposite the Drying Barns hoping to hear a Corn Bunting but there were no birds, apart from Chaffinches and House Sparrows. We were well behind schedule by then and our next plan, as it always is, was to go back to Titchwell. Wendy hadn't been back since our disastrous 1st visit on the way in when we got absolutely soaked, so she hadn't had a chance of the Spot Crake yet. Going by the reports it didn't seem to show during the day and favoured early morning and evening, so we weren't hedging our bets.

It was 2.22pm when we parked up at Titchwell car park and luckily it was sunny, so it should be a much more pleasant experience than our first. We headed straight for the Island Hide area and scanned the reeds bordering the Fresh Marsh. Nothing! We moved further up for a scan of the rest of the marsh and I took the opportunity to put my feet up for a few minutes. Lyca, who obviously has sense, thought she'd put her paws up too :P.



Fresh Marsh

We really didn't have the time to stick around and when we heard some Birders saying it hadn't been seen since early that morning there was only one thing for it.....forget it! We wandered up to the Brackish Marsh for a quick look and found 3x **Grey Plover**, which were still in their nice summer plumage. There was no sign, yet again, of any Spotshanks even though they're often reported when we're there and we never see anything other than Redshanks!

After that we headed up the path towards the beach to see what we could find from there hoping for a Knot or something. The boardwalk had obviously gone, as it was lying washed up at Kelling, and the footpath was blocked off. There was now a path alongside the brackish marsh, which felt a bit like we were trespassing on the reserve. Scanning desperately and quickly, as we were running late, we found absolutely nothing new on the beach or out to sea.



Beach

Ah well, it's always worth a look and sometimes we strike it lucky but on this occasion, probably because we were already late, we didn't. Wasting no more time we hotfooted it back to the car stopping only to look at the 14x Spoonbills asleep on the far Island.

We then had a new entry for our list and added **Oystercatcher**.....Go us! Hahahahahaha! Back at the car we really had to get a move on and it was already 3.58pm when we left. As usual we couldn't leave Norkolk without a visit to nearby Flitcham Abbey Farm. This is a hit and miss place, which is great for a last minute Little Owl or Turtle Dove.....or nothing if we're there :P.

At 4.20pm we pulled up in the car park, which looked a lot different to when we'd last been there. One of the massive trees had come down, obviously in the storms and was lying on the ground ½ cleared.



Timber!

There was a big pile of chippings from where someone had been chopping it up, so it could be moved. Wendy was loving the smell of the chippings and said it reminded her of Christmas.....cos she's a massive pansy. We decided to leave Lyca in the car just in case there was someone else in the hide and luckily it wasn't too hot by then. We had a feeling we wouldn't be long and didn't have much time to spare anyway. Just as we were sitting down and weren't even

looking we both heard a familiar, "Squeak!" Luckily I caught a flash of the bird and shouted out, "**Kingfisher!**" but by the time I'd said it the bird had flown behind the bank. It was still a good unexpected and last minute bird for the trip though :). We looked everywhere for the Little Owls over and over but there was no sign of any.....Boooooo! The chances of Turtle Dove at that time of year were too slim and when there wasn't even one in with the Stock Doves, which flew in, we gave up.



Flitcham

The only things making themselves known were 2 noisy Jays, so we went back to the car. I saw this as a fitting moment to call time and pack away the cameras, as we weren't going to need them again :{.

We left for our journey north at 4.35pm passing a dead Badger in the road in Lincolnshire :(. We were making good progress and hadn't hit any bad traffic in the usual places, so it was looking good. Wendy noticed a line of old classic and new VW Campervans heading south on the opposite side of the motorway, so they were all obviously off to some cool meet. We kept spotting more and more heading in the same direction and it was interesting to see the difference in condition of them all. Some were real old bangers and others had obviously had a small fortune spent on them and looked good as new. When we hit Newark roundabout the traffic was at a standstill.....Urrghhhh! Eventually it was my right of way and I slowly pulled into my lane just as a Royal Mail Lorry decided to be very naughty and pulled out in front of me to my left.....Aarrghhhh! That could've been nasty if I'd been going faster! There was a huge traffic jam further up and it was annoying watching all the middle lane hoppers barge into the left lane thinking they were going to get through it quicker only for the middle lane to start moving again. We kept passing them sitting in the middle lane and they'd barge their way in in front of oncoming cars to get back in when the left lane had ground to a halt again.....idiots! We were making such slow progress that I just wanted to keep driving until we got to the pub but Wendy wasn't having any of it. She wanted to stop ½ way, so we could use the WC's, have tea and to also give Lyca the chance to do the same. It made sense but was going to mean we'd be arriving in Yorkshire much later than we'd hoped, so it'd be well dark....Boooooooo!

Finally we reached Blyth Services at 7.15pm and Wendy bolted inside to get money out, use the loos and get some fries from Burger King. I gave Lyca her tea, which she turned her nose up at and let her out for a wee but she wasn't

interested and just wanted to play with the other dogs. We got back in the car to wait for Wendy but Lyca started sniffing about and looking unsettled. I let her out again and she had a wee this time, so was just being a pain in the bum. Wendy appeared after finally getting some money and some fries, so we ate them with the sarnies we had left. Wendy noticed all the Pied Wagtails gathering on the roof of the Travelodge, which were coming in before roosting for the night. She counted 40+ in the end and it would've been interesting to stick around to see exactly how many turned up and which tree they all went into. We didn't have time for that though and at 7.51pm we headed off for Clapham in Yorkshire.

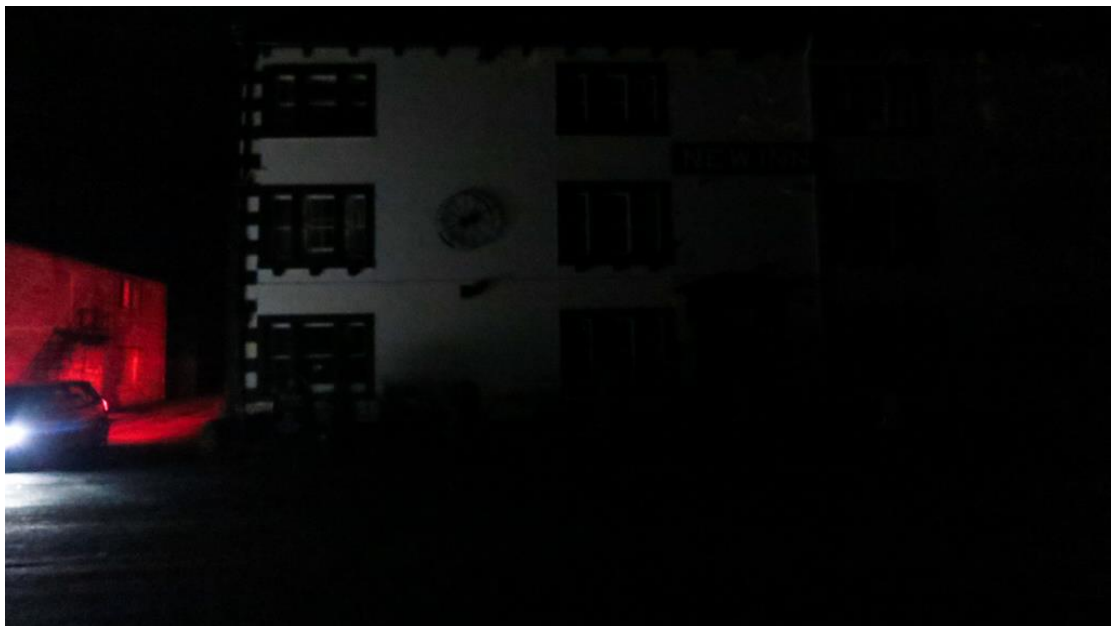
It was a long and boring drive made worse by more traffic jams we encountered on the way. It was getting very dark too, so all my hopes of admiring the Yorkshire scenery were shattered. Eventually Wendy spotted Pendle Hill in the distance, so she knew we were nearly there. I had the route all planned out in my Sat Nav especially to avoid driving through the likes of Halifax and Bury but Wendy was insisting we were going the long way and shouldn't be driving round the hill at all. The roads were dark and narrow and having never driven them before I took it slowly. Wendy kept looking for familiar signs but didn't recognise any of the small villages we were going through. Finally we hit Wigglesworth, which according to her was well off track for Clapham, and saw a Hedgehog waddling across the road. Something else caught our eye flying over the road like a very large bat, which turned out to be a Snipe! All of a sudden we turned a corner and Wendy let out a cheer. She then reliably (Ahem!) informed me that we were now heading towards the main road and Clapham wasn't far away.....Phew!

At 10.12pm we pulled up outside The New Inn in Clapham and Wendy went in to make sure we could take Lyca in with us. The Landlord was very friendly and told her that of course she could go in, so she came out to give me the nod. It was pretty busy when I brought her into the bar and she instantly stood up onto her back legs and started waving at anyone and anything, which raised an eyebrow or two with the punters. We took a seat next to the fireplace and breathed a sigh of relief that we could now relax for a bit. I thought the bar was full of very loud drunks, which having been in Norfolk surrounded with kids called Jonty and Noah for a week was a huge contrast. Wendy assured me that they weren't drunk they were just Northerners and that we were back on home ground having left the poncy Southerners way behind.



Fully fledged pub dog

Wendy wanted to let her Mum know that we'd arrived but there was no signal, so went outside to see if she could get one out there. When she came back in she hadn't got a signal but was with a bloke who'd started a conversation up with her outside when he'd arrived. Wendy went back to the bar to get another drink and he sat down on a stool next to her chatting away. Hahahahahaha trust Wendy to pick up another random! By then we were both really flagging and weren't looking forward to the boat journey home in the dog lounge....ATALL! We just wanted to get our heads down in a cabin like we usually do :(One of the blokes at the bar was getting right on my nerves, he was really loud and gobby and wouldn't shut up. He was a right know it all and argued everything that was said to him, so I was only too pleased when it was time to go. Most of the punters had already gone, which only left some die hards, a handful of residents from the hotel and us, so we took the hint and left. Back at the car it was 11.35pm and after pulling out Lycas fleece, to use on the boat, Wendy ran over the road to the stream to get a pic of the nice pub. In the space of time it'd taken us to go outside she found that all the lights had already been switched off and the place was in total darkness.....Oooooops!



New Inn (honest!)

We didn't have far to go and stopped at Asda to fill my car up with petrol before we parked up at Heysham at 12.30am. There were loads of trucks, cars and bikes waiting to board, so it looked as though it was going to be a very busy boat, not what we needed without a cabin! Wendy pulled Lycas fleece up around them both and the pair of them fell asleep on the front seat.



Tired Doggy

I couldn't sleep and had a job waking Wendy up when it was time to board at 2.05am. It didn't help that she had her knee on top of my gear stick when I needed to get going! A ½ asleep Wendy carried a very tired Lyca up the stairs, still wrapped up in her blanket, into the dog lounge. When we opened the door we were horrified to find that it was absolutely chokka but we found a seat and Lyca lay on Wendy's lap. The seats were really uncomfortable and Wendy used her rucksack as a pillow to try and get comfy and fall asleep again but failed miserably. We departed bang on 2.15am and luckily the sea was flat calm and the crossing was smooth. We wouldn't have even known we were on a boat it was so smooth apart from the surroundings.

Having been assured by one of Wendy's work colleagues that the dog lounge was never busy and totally fine we were very disappointed that it was so busy. There were 7 other dogs in the lounge with their owners but luckily Lyca was happy on Wendy's knee, which was a great relief. There was a Springer Spaniel on the bench to our left, who didn't seem so settled and had taken a dislike to one of the dogs. This dog was making a lot of noise behind us and we wondered what on earth was going on. At first we thought it was a young dog, who'd just been collected from the UK by a girl because its owners couldn't handle it. After a while we realized that it wasn't that dog at all but a Staffie, who was wandering around the lounge on his own with his lead dragging on the floor behind him. His owner was so drunk that he was slumped over in his chair fast asleep and his dog was just looking for attention. He wandered around aimlessly crying and when you looked into his eyes it was obvious that he wasn't a happy dog at all. It was a really sad situation but luckily the owner of the Springer Spaniel, a kind Geordie woman, took him under her wing and stroked him for the duration of the sailing. At one point her Springer had a go at the Staffie, so there was a bit of conflict and after some snarling and growling she brilliantly broke it up. The Staffie's owner woke up briefly with all the commotion and slurred, "Shut up you little ****!" to his dog before returning to his comatose state. It's just a shame that his owner saw fit to just ignore him and left the responsibility entirely to someone else.....Grrrrrrrr! The drunk man's only other input was to rise out of his seat for a second while he relieved himself of some VERY loud wind!

With all this going on around me I just couldn't sleep but Wendy was lucky (as usual) and managed to get ½hr- 1hr in. Needless to say that we were very happy to arrive at The Sea Terminal at 5.47am and we all got up with our dogs on their leads to disembark. All but one that is, who was still slumped in his seat dead to

the world! His poor dog wanted to follow everyone out of the lounge but obviously he had to stay with his owner :(I had to grab the extendable lead and real the bundle of muscle back to his owner before he wandered off into the main lounge on his own. The nice Geordie lady went off to complain about the man and to fill them in on the situation that they were going to have to deal with when they had to try and wake him up. We didn't envy them! As we left she said that they'd been told and Wendy thanked her for what she'd done and said that it was a good job she'd been there and they both agreed on how sad the situation was. We all had to leave the poor dog behind the door knowing fine well that his owner wasn't fit to have a dog especially one as temperamental yet affectionate and loyal as a Staffie :(Wendy even felt like taking him home with her and she's not a Staffie fan! Feeling utterly depressed by the whole thing we headed to the car and were driving off at 6.05am.

We were home at 6.15am and we all went straight to bed and slept until the alarm went off at 11am. We had to be up in time for our Tesco delivery although we could've easily slept all day.....Urrghhhh!

All in all it'd been a great holiday even though it hadn't felt particularly exciting bird wise I still came away with 2 lifers. We'd covered a total of only 1091 miles, which is one of our lowest yet but who knows how many miles we'd walked! Our HQ had been amazing and we really couldn't fault it in way. We ended the trip on 110 birds, which is a fairly decent total considering. Wendy had come away with no lifers apart from the Small Red-eyed Damselflies and Clouded Yellow, which were also lifers for me too. Obviously we'd had some lifer moths to add to our list as well, so we can't complain.

Due to the high cost of going away in August (£500 just for the ferry!) we don't think we'll be going away during the school holidays again anytime soon. A month later and Norfolk was caked in amazing migrants so we think we'll push the July/August holiday back to then instead!

Again we missed any decent wind direction to bring in some decent migrants.....Urrghhhh! The question is can we break our usual easterlies jinx, as we've planned a 2wk mega trip in early October starting in Cornwall and ending in Norfolk. Surely we can manage to pull something good out of that one.....or can we? :/.

Bird List

Mute Swan	Avocet	Green Woodpecker
Greylag Goose	Little Ringed Plover	Skylark
Canada Goose	Ringed Plover	Sand Martin
Egyptian Goose	Grey Plover	Swallow
Shelduck	Lapwing	House Martin
Wigeon	Knot	Meadow Pipit
Gadwall	Dunlin	Yellow Wagtail
Teal	Ruff	Pied Wagtail
Mallard	Snipe	Wren
Pintail	Black-tailed Godwit	Dunnock
Shoveler	Whimbrel	Robin
Pochard	Curlew	Blackbird
Tufted Duck	Common Sandpiper	Song Thrush
Red-legged Partridge	Green Sandpiper	Mistle Thrush
Grey Partridge	Greenshank	Sedge Warbler
Pheasant	Redshank	Reed Warbler
Little Grebe	Turnstone	Whitethroat
Fulmar	Arctic Skua	Goldcrest

Manx Shearwater	Kittiwake	Firecrest
Gannet	Black-headed Gull	Long-tailed Tit
Cormorant	Common Gull	Blue Tit
Shag	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Great Tit
Little Egret	Herring Gull	Coal Tit
Great White Egret	Yellow-legged Gull	Magpie
Grey Heron	Caspian Gull	Jackdaw
Spoonbill	Great Black-backed Gull	Rook
Marsh Harrier	Sandwich Tern	Carrion Crow
Sparrowhawk	Common Tern	Starling
Buzzard	Guillemot	House Sparrow
Kestrel	Razorbill	Chaffinch
Hobby	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Greenfinch
Water Rail	Stock Dove	Goldfinch
Spotted Crake	Woodpigeon	Siskin
Moorhen	Collared Dove	Linnet
Coot	Tawny Owl	Yellowhammer
Common Crane	Swift	Reed Bunting
Oystercatcher	Kingfisher	

