

Norfolk September 2011

After our trip to the Scottish Highlands in May we just couldn't go through the year without another visit to the birding Mecca of Norfolk. This year we thought we'd try the first week in September as we've always gone later in the month and just missed out on our dream bird the 'Wryneck'. We've also missed out on easterly winds every single time so by going earlier we thought we might hit the perfect wind conditions for migrants. With just a week to go it seemed that the entire European population of Wrynecks had already been and gone through the UK! To top it off the weather forecast was saying strong westerly winds for the week and several days of heavy rain! We couldn't believe that it was looking like a disaster waiting to happen before we'd even left and a report of 4 x Black Terns at the Point of Ayre on the day we were leaving just added insult to injury. Scotland was going to be hard to beat!

Friday 2nd September

We arrived at the boat late again but spawnily got put at the back of lane one so were on board in no time....Wahey :). While we were waiting in the car park we saw **Housemartin**, **Herring Gull** and **Feral Pigeon**. It took a while to load the boat with all the bikes leaving at the end of Grand Prix week which would explain why the boat tickets were a mega rip off....Dohh. We finally boarded at 7.10pm and from our cabin we could see **Shag**, **Black-headed Gull**, **Great black-backed Gull**, **Jackdaw** and a fisherman accidentally catching a young **Herring Gull** by its wing, he seemed very concerned though and managed to release it without harm. We eventually set sail, late, at 7.57pm and tried to pick up some more sea birds from the cabin window. This produced nothing so we went outside on the deck but by then it was too dark to see anything so we decided to try to get some sleep. Seeing nothing on the crossing was a first for us so we hoped this wasn't a taste of what was to come :/. We were already totally knackered after a busy day at work and we thought that once we got our heads down we'd have no problem getting a couple of hours sleep.....wrong! I had no sleep at all and Wendy managed about an hour, if that....Urrghhhh. We finally arrived at Heysham at 11.50pm, disembarked 25 minutes later and were in the terminal car park so that 'somebody' could get the first coffee fix before setting off.

Saturday 3rd September

The best route down to Norfolk is across England on the M62, above Manchester and then down the A1. This is the standard way for the majority of northern birders and we are no different. Unfortunately I didn't notice that, somewhere along the line, my satnav had decided to completely change my chosen route.....until we went straight past the M62 junction! A quick check of the satnavs new route sent shivers down my spine. It wanted me to go into Birmingham and then through several big cities.....OMG! By 2am we'd reached Sandbach services so we thought it would be a good idea to stop off for a break and to stretch our legs. I couldn't resist putting £1 in a fruit machine and when it told me I'd won £27 I was well chuffed. Having not played on a fruity for about 20 years I was slightly out of practice and had no idea what I was doing, I hit every button to try and get my money but somehow managed to transfer the money to a "play kitty" and I couldn't get it out... Noooooooo. In the end after 27 (forced!) plays I came away with £9, which I suppose, was better than a kick in the teeth. Struggling with tiredness we continued on our journey until we came up against a sign saying that the motorway was closed.....Noooooo!!! More bad luck and we hadn't even got to Norfolk yet. I totally panicked which, funnily enough woke up all my senses, as we were diverted into some big city with dual carriageway driving and an unfeasible amount of lane changes. Thank god we were driving at stupid o'clock as I don't think my late decisions at junctions would have gone down well with the English drivers who don't seem to be as chilled out as us Manxies ;). Eventually we made it back on the motorway but we were flagging again so at 4am I pulled into a McDonalds/Petrol Station car park and we had a nap. We were woken up half an hour later by a sound far worse than the worlds most annoying alarm clock.....Eminem! We had a car full of teenagers parked up nearby, windows down and looking over at us.....Urrghhhh. One of them was circling round on a push scooter, which was probably stolen! I sensed that there could be trouble from these lads but Wendy still got out of the car determined to appease her coffee addiction from McDonalds. When they started shouting over to her she thought better of it and as we were in no fit state to deal with them we took a spin through the drive through and left quickly at 5am.....we must be getting old! We couldn't help but wonder what they were doing there at 4am. Don't teenagers sleep for at least 14 hours a day nowadays? By then it was starting to get light and we saw a **Rabbit**, our first mammal of

the trip, and a **Blackbird**. When we hit Suffolk we saw our first **Woodpigeon** of the millions we would be seeing in Norfolk, they are like Chaffinches are to Scotland! At 6.05am we pulled up at Wangford W.C's, which were closed, but we saw a **Grey Squirrel**, **Rook**, **Carrion Crow** and **Magpie**.

It had taken 4 hours 45 minutes driving time (not bad considering the crazy diversion) to reach RSPB Lakenheath, which was our first planned stop of the day. It was 6.24am when we got out of the car for a wander to see what was about and we weren't feeling too bad.....yet. It was a nice sight in the still morning but was just a touch on the cold side.



We had a walk down the track and picked up **Pheasant**, **Great Tit**, **Moorhen**, **Great-spotted Woodpecker**, **Whitethroat**, **Reed Bunting**, **Blue Tit**, **Wren**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Reed Warbler**, **Willow Warbler**, **Dunnock**, **Goldfinch**, **Greenfinch** and **Mute Swan**. There was also a Dragonfly flying around which we presumed to be a Migrant Hawker. As it was only 7am we couldn't help but wonder how it had got itself warm enough to fly, as it was quite overcast and very cold... weird. The Visitor Centre was closed till 9am so we'd planned to nip across to NWT Weeting Heath for 7am when they opened their doors. We left Lakenheath at 7.20am and 7 minutes later were in Weeting car park looking at another closed door! There was a sign saying that it was open from 7am until September so our bladders would have to wait. It was still freezing cold and lack of sleep was catching up with us but we wanted to see if the Stone Curlews were still about as they are supposed to gather in numbers there, in September, before migration. We walked over to the hide and looked out over the field but there was no sign of our target bird. We could only see **Lapwing**, **Buzzard**, **Stock Dove**, **Chaffinch**, **Treecreeper**, **Lesser black-backed Gull** and **Jay**. We'd hoped to see a Stoat while we were there but only heard what sounded like one catching it's breakfast from deep inside a rabbit warren. Yet again there was no sign of any Woodlarks, which are apparently common here.....Grrrrr. We moved on to the next hide where we knew there were Marsh Tits but the feeders were empty and the woods were dead so we gave it up as a bad job to find the nearest W.C.

We returned to Lakenheath car park for the second time at 8.30am and nodded off till 8.55am.....lightweights! The weather was clear and a bit chilly so after kitting ourselves out with hats and gloves we set out to see what we could find. We were still half asleep when we set off and further down the path we were alerted by the sound of feet running behind us. We nearly jumped out of our skins when a Grey Squirrel came hurtling down the path and ran straight past us! It had been scared off by some people further up the path and must have also had a fright when it saw us around

the corner. We picked up **Moorhen, Coot, Great Crested Grebe, Gadwall, Common Tern, Housemartin, Coal Tit, Cormorant** and **Little Grebe** x 11 on what was now our second walk down the track. It was quite sunny by now and the heat had soared so we were totally overdressed and I was sweating buckets. The sun had brought out loads of Dragonflies so we stopped to check them out but all we could find were **Common Darter** and **Migrant Hawker**. The Dragonflies had attracted a **Hobby**, which swooped down right next to us.....an awesome sight. We were hoping to see some of the Norfolk specialties but it seemed that **Common Blue Damselfly**, **Migrant Hawker** and **Common Darter** Dragonflies were all that were about. Eventually though, after looking at 1.2 million **Common Darters** we found a couple of lovely **Ruddy Darter**, which was our first lifer of the trip, even if it wasn't a bird! I hadn't brought my camera with me though on this walk so had to run back to the car to get it whilst Wendy had a caffeine top up.



It was 20 degrees when we arrived back at the car park and there were wasps everywhere. This was something we'd completely overlooked but September is THE worst month of the year for them....Urrghhh. I was really hoping they wouldn't ruin our holiday! By now it was 11.40am so we headed off to stock up at Morrison's in Fakenham before going to find our H.Q for the week. On the way we saw another **Hobby**, chasing **Housemartins** and we were surprised by a bright yellow **Brimstone** Butterfly flying across the road, which was lifer number two for us both.

Before we came away we'd been quite excited about a reported **Wryneck** on a playing field at Wells-next-the-sea so thought that as we were passing the town we'd go for a look. This bird had been there for 4-5 days but, just our luck, hadn't been reported for the past 2 days. We didn't expect to find it but we had to give it a shot, as it could be the only chance we'd have of seeing **Wryneck**. We arrived in a very busy Wells to find that the playing field was full of families and their dogs enjoying the weekend sunshine. Aarrghhh.....probably the reason the bird cleared off then! We saw loads of **House Sparrows** there but nothing else so moved off to the cottage.



We arrived at our H.Q at 2.04pm, unpacked our stuff and got our bearings. Our first impressions were good it had a lovely garden with an orchard to the right and was set down a track just off the main road.



It was fully kitted out for everything we could need including a Blu-ray player and Apple TV but no microwave, which it was supposed to have according to the website. Unlike our Scottish cottage it was spotlessly clean so there was no need to get out the Dettol and scrubbing brush....Phew!

After unpacking and having a small breather we headed out again at 3.54pm to Holme Dunes. We were on the hunt for a previously reported Red-backed Shrike and arrived, more than slightly tired, at 4.43pm. Obviously there was no sign of the bird but we put a lot of effort into checking all the bushes in the dunes. Wendy used her 'pishing' skills, which brilliantly brought out **Robin, Linnet, Whitethroat** and **Lesser Whitethroat** but there was nothing more interesting than that despite our best efforts. On the edge of the dunes we could see over the sands and there were loads of waders just out of ID range so we could only add **Oystercatcher, Curlew** and **Little Egret**. We left at 5.35pm and on the way back we saw our 3rd Hobby of the day! We were worried that we wouldn't see many at this time of year but it looked as though coming earlier in September meant that they hadn't left to migrate yet. We got back to H.Q at 6.20pm, finally had some tea and sat down to chill out. A nice end to a very long day was a **Tawny Owl** calling at around 8pm when Wendy went outside with her Bat Detector, which picked up Pipistrelles in the garden.

Sunday 4th September

Even though we'd had such a hectic day yesterday Wendy was up at 5.57am and was horrified to find that she had forgotten to pack her milk frothing device for making Cappuccino.....disaster!!! It was grey, overcast and forecasting rain for 10am so we had to get out early to make the most of the dry conditions. Yet again the winds were totally wrong for bringing in any interesting migrants but you never know until you get out there and look. I thought that today we could try the local areas so we would have half a chance of recovering from yesterday and be near the reserves with hides in case it thrashed it down. The first stop of the day was the Deli in Cley to satisfy Wendy's craving for posh coffee and on the way, driving through Blakeney, we saw a **Kestrel**. We arrived at the Cley visitor centre at 9.50am and from the car park we could see **Marsh Harrier, Black-Tailed Godwit, Curlew, Little Egret, Wigeon** and **Canada Geese**. This was only a quick W.C break before heading off to nearby Walsey Hills just around the corner. We'd arrived 10 minutes before opening and I was amazed to see people already queuing up outside! I wondered if they were selling the new iphone in there or something :-/. We then moved round the corner to Walsey Hills, which we always check as it looks brilliant for migrants although we were yet to come up with anything outstanding in all our visits.

Today was no different, there had been a Red-backed Shrike there, just days before, but it had gone before we even arrived in Norfolk. We got talking to a nice old birder up there who'd seen the bird and was disappointed that it was 'just' a juvenile, even though it had been giving crippling views. That would've done us very nicely, thank you very much! We stood there chatting and saw a **Chiffchaff** feeding in the bushes and a **Sparrowhawk** zoomed past, missing its breakfast by millimetres. Deciding that there was nothing else about we gave up but instead of going to go to Cley reserve as planned we went for the walk down the East Bank instead.

Walking along the ridge was thoroughly unpleasant as we were being battered by the winds. The **Golden Plover** were already back, for the winter and the **Bearded Tits** were calling all around us. September is when they are supposed to be most vocal and families of them are visible flying low over the tops of the reeds and sitting out in the open. Could I finally get a decent shot of one after failing miserably so far? Nope! Due to the strong winds they were all staying low down... Urrghhh! There were also **Teal**, **Redshank**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Greenshank**, Lapwing, **Avocet**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Pied Wagtail**, Black-tailed Godwit, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Dunlin**, **Linnet**, Little Egret and **Shelduck** in and around the pools. We made our way over the shingle ridge and sat down on the stones to look out over the sea. It was dead apart from **Sandwich Terns** but we weren't surprised as the wind was totally wrong for any kind of action. After 10 minutes of nothingness Wendy glanced at a bird flying towards us and sarcastically said, "Ooooo another Sarnie, Wow!" I looked up at it and said, "Hang on are you sure?" We both got our bins on it and I called out, "**Little Gull!**" cool. Not exactly amazing but still nice to find and no others were reported that day in Norfolk. I checked my phone and saw that I finally had a 3g signal (it had been a real struggle to find a signal anywhere so far) and posted the report on the BirdGuides new iphone app. I could now finally check for any other sightings too and was horrified to see a report of 2 Great White Egrets at Stiffkey at 11am.....Aarrghhh! I think if I'd chosen BirdGuides text alert instead of BirdNews we would have been alerted earlier as more often than not there's a phone signal but no 3g signal. We just had to hope that it wouldn't matter though and we picked ourselves up from the beach and hurried back to the car. Luckily it wasn't far away and 15 minutes later we were there.

At 11.55am we got out of the car and saw that there were a few birders about so we presumed that it had to be a good sign. Unfortunately we overheard a couple of blokes talking about how the bird had flown south just 25 minutes ago.....Grrrrr! We carried on listening to their conversation to see if there was any more info but all we could gather was that there were no birds and the area was dead (not even a warbler!) even though one of them had covered both sides that morning. Oh great, but we'd dropped everything to get there so we thought we might as well have a look despite the negative vibes. As we were about to set off Wendy asked some birders who had just come off the path about the Egrets and they confirmed that the birds had indeed flown away.....Flipping heck :( We headed off up the path anyway, along the line of trees and bushes overlooking the salt marsh. It looked as though the bloke we overheard was actually right to complain as we could see nor hear anything except loads of Wood Pigeons in the fields. This was really unusual for September in Norfolk but we decided to check out the east side as well but only as far as the 'whirly gig'. The thing with this place, when it's quiet, is that if you don't find a finch or tit flock you've had it. The sun was out but it was windy and there were berry bushes smothered in wasps everywhere but surprisingly they were ignoring us...so far. It wasn't long before we found a Whitethroat, then another and another followed by, to our relief, a finch flock. In it were Linnet, Goldfinch and Greenfinch and there were House Sparrows, Dunnock, Wren, Blackbird, Blue Tit and **Reed Bunting** in the bushes. We could also hear a sound that was very familiar to us but we just couldn't place it so we stood by it and waited. A few more Whitethroats were flitting about but we knew it wasn't them. As we waited we could see more Ruff out on the salt marsh and a small group of **Long-tailed Tits** moved through. Every movement we saw turned out to be a Blue Tit but this bird was low down deep inside the back of the bramble bush and was in no hurry to show itself. Another couple joined us and the four of us stared at the bush following the sound until eventually we saw a quick flash of the culprit.....a **Blackcap!** Ah well, it could've been anything :/. We carried on to the whirly gig and were looking at the area thinking about its potential and all the hundreds of Wrynecks that had been seen here over the years when all of a sudden Wendy shrieked. She then started shaking her leg looking very freaked out after feeling a sharp pain and noticing a wasp on the ground next to her. She reckoned it had made an intoxicated effort to sting her before she'd knocked it off so it could've been a lot worse. These wasps had obviously had a few too many over-ripe fruits and were getting drunk and disorderly so we decided to make a hasty retreat back to the car for lunch.

We got back at 1.45pm and ate our sarnies while we watched more Whitethroats and a **Goldcrest** working their way through the brambles and another Hobby flew over us. We left at 2.40pm and were back at Cley by 2.56pm walking out to Bishops Hide by which point the sky was looking rather dark. We settled ourselves into the hide and had a quick scan around. The best thing about these hides is that you get good views over the pools and muddy areas around them and the birds often come in very close to feed. Recently the Norfolk Wildlife Trust had drained the pools there so the area was practically pure mud, which seemed to have brought in more Waders than usual. We could see the Waders but they were over on the other side so further away than we'd have liked. In there were loads of **Dunlin** and **Ringed Plover**, a couple of **Snipe**, a lovely group of 10+ **Curlew Sandpiper**, 3 x **Little Stint** and 2 x **Green Sandpiper**. A **Common Sandpiper** flew in just outside the hide and on the bank were **Shoveler**, Teal, Wigeon, Coot and, of course **Mallard**. Eventually the Common Sandpiper came right up to the near edge and in the rain I managed this shot with a high iso.



Further away still were Black-headed Gulls, Canada and **Greylag Geese** and Pied Wagtails were dotted around all over the place. We scanned all the wagtails in case of anything unusual like a Yellow Wagtail but couldn't see anything. We'd noticed by now how dark it had become and sure enough the heavens opened and the rain lashed down. Lucky we were in a hide at this point, unlike at home where there are none to shelter in! The rain pushed the birds right up to the bank in front of us and brought in a **Pochard**, **Pintail**, **Common Gull**, Mute Swan, 20 + Snipe and another Hobby whizzed in to have a pop at the waders while they were easy targets.



There was a woman sitting nearby and Wendy asked her if there were any thunderstorms forecast but she shrugged it off and then got very excited about the **Egyptian Geese** I pointed out. About 10 seconds later there was a loud clap of thunder and we all looked at each other.....freaky! After about 20 minutes it stopped raining for a second so we thought we'd better move on and the bipolar weather reminded us of our Scotland trip. While we were on the boardwalk to the next hide I spotted a tiny **Frog**, which was trying to jump over the side and back into the reeds. The sides were too high so I picked him up and lifted him over. 2 steps later we found another and then another so we'd started the 'Frog Rescue Team (Norfolk Division)'. This ended up including a small **Lizard** as we don't like discrimination but eventually it turned competitive! We were barging past each other trying to save as many frogs as we could and Wendy reckons she won. Haha. She did seem to have an inbuilt frog radar though as I missed loads walking ahead of her.. Doh. Further on we could see 2 people approaching, who also picked up a frog, so I jokingly suggested we tried to recruit them into 'F.R.T.N.D'. As we passed them Wendy screamed at the woman "Another volunteer?" but failed to mention anything about the frogs. Hahaha the poor woman looked scared stiff, probably thinking we were Jehovah Witnesses or something :). After they had scurried away from us we heard a high-pitched squeaking and looked down to see 2 **Shrews** having a tussle in the grass....cool.

As we approached Avocet Hide we could hear more Beardies so we waited to see if they would come out so I could get a decent photo. They did but it was very hard to get a clear shot through the reeds and it was raining but eventually I got this, which is my best Bearded Tit photo to date.





This hide isn't the best one at the reserve but it's always worth a look and on the pool we could see 3 x **Greenshank** and at the side there was a **Whimbrel**. A Green Sandpiper was just in front of us and another 2 flew over and landed on another pool further away. A Sparrowhawk appeared, as if it had just launched itself off the roof above us, and landed on a gate post miles off. We didn't hang about in this one and moved next door to Daukes Hide scaring a **Sedge Warbler** and a Reed Warbler off the boardwalk and into a bush.....unusual behaviour for these birds. There wasn't much to be seen from this hide either and the only new bird we could find was a **Tufted Duck**. It was now getting late and we were very tired and hungry so we packed up at 6.10pm. There were more frogs on the boardwalk on the way out and we were back at the car by 6.25pm, unstung by wasps but the midgies were out in force. On the way out of Cley we spotted a **Peregrine**, which we didn't expect to see here at all and more frogs hopping about on the roads in the town, which made for some interesting manoeuvres on the way home!

We were back at H.Q by 6.40, delayed briefly by waiting for another massive frog to cross the track to the cottage, and had our tea. Wendy couldn't wait for a shower but had to, as all that was coming out after using it last night was ice-cold water. We hadn't realised that we had to turn the water heating on after each time we'd used it.....Doh!



Wendy went outside again later that night and heard the Tawny Owl calling again but she called me out to try and get a macro pic of what appeared to be a huge frog. I got her to shine a torch on it and we were really surprised when we saw it that it was actually a **Common Toad**. Another lifer for us both.....Woo Hoo! Again, not a bird but we were still chuffed to bits as we'd always wanted to see a Toad! Amazingly I even managed to get an ok shot of it using the inbuilt flash on the old 20d!



Monday 5th September

Wendy must've been tired, I think it's safe to say she had a lie in this morning, and got up at 6.50am. I wasn't far behind though and surfaced at 7.30am to find a nice sunny day, which was still windy but colder than it had been. We left H.Q at 8.45am and headed into Blakeney for the all important cappuccino fix. Today's plan was to head down to the east coast and check out Winterton Dunes where we'd seen the Red-backed Shrike last year and we know it's one of the best places to find your own migrants. As we entered Winterton Wendy spotted some birds in a field so I slammed on the brakes. We got our bins on them and saw that they were **Red-legged Partridge** and loads of them too. It was like some sort of free-range Red-leg farm or something! We arrived at the car park at 10.35am and headed for our walk into the south dunes. The wind had picked up even more so we were doubtful that we'd see anything, as any birds would be sheltering deep in the bushes. We looked up and were surprised to see 2 x **Swift** overhead in amongst the numerous Swallows and Housemartins. We hadn't seen Swifts in the IOM since the one at Smeale on 20th August. Further along there 4 more which were flying slowly and very low so I took this rare opportunity to attempt to get a shot.....and failed. Skillzz. The bushes were dead and despite our best efforts even Wendy's pishing couldn't coax anything out other than another Blackcap and Whitethroat. This was a real disappointment as I'd pinned my hopes of finding something good in these bushes. Even though it was blowing a gale it was sunny and yet again we were overdressed and sweating buckets in the heat but the sky was looking very threatening indeed.



We realised we were wasting our time here and went back to the car for some lunch at 12.22am. As we sat there a dark bird flew towards us over the sea but by the time I'd got my bins on it, it had gone. It was a Skua and most likely to be an **Arctic Skua**, it would be wishful thinking to consider anything else. There were more Sandwich Terns out there too but apart from some Cormorants, that was it! Although we'd been here before we'd never checked the north end dunes so at 1.05pm we headed off to find ourselves a Wryneck..... Ha ha ha :P. This time I took a risk and left my coat in the car whereas Wendy played it safe and continued to boil in hers. Looking out to sea we finally added **Gannet** to our list. Not far into the dunes a bird flew up from the Maram grass and landed a bit further along. It was definitely a Pipit of some description and a large one at that.....we had to relocate it to find out. We walked back to where it appeared to have landed and Wendy stayed on the beach while I climbed up onto the dunes to get a different angle. It flew again and landed about 10 yards away and this brief view confirmed it to be around Skylark sized. We walked back and tried to be clever by waiting below a gap in the Maram grass hoping it would walk out into view. About 30 seconds later it did just that... we both got our bins on it but only got a nano second glimpse as it flew off and disappeared over the ridge the second it saw us...Nooooooo! I was gutted by that, the tactic of getting ahead and waiting from a distance always works, well usually :( . Neither of us could get any detail and all I got from the view was a small looking head with a pale face.....Urrghhhh! It could so easily have been our first lifer bird of the trip and it had gone, so eventually but reluctantly we gave up. We'd started to feel a few spots of rain but it was only fine drizzle so we wandered back to the car leisurely. Until now I'd been soooooo pleased I hadn't brought my coat as it was really warm and Wendy had been sweating buckets but all of a sudden it went very dark! A minute ago we'd been walking in the sun but now we were standing in a torrential downpour. The wind and rain were lashing straight in our faces so I decided to run for the huts near the car park to shelter, as my camera isn't waterproof and without a coat nor was I. When I reached the huts I stopped to wait for Wendy to come and shelter too. There was a couple there already who'd had the same idea as me and I got chatting to them. I then noticed that Wendy, with her head down, had walked straight past me at the huts and was heading for the car! Being the gentleman I am :) I broke into my Usain Bolt skills and pelted towards the car park. I reckon if anyone on the UK Athletics Board saw me I would have been picked for 2012 :P. Typically, the rain stopped about 2 seconds after we got back in the car and the sun came out again...Arghhhh! We couldn't have been any wetter if we'd jumped in the sea, our trousers were stuck to our legs and we were literally dripping so we both stood outside and amazingly dried off pretty quickly in the strong wind....Sorted :) As I got dry and loaded the car up I noticed a double rainbow over the sea. It was like no other we'd seen before in that it had the usual arc but with



a rainbow glow like a mist over the water underneath it....weird. We tried to get a pic but it faded very quickly and a camera just couldn't do it justice.



We left at 2.40pm to go to our next location of the day which was a place called Rush Hill Scrape. I'd read about this place and seen it mentioned several times on BirdGuides in relation to good Waders but we had never been there before. The only thing I knew was that it was difficult to park anywhere near it. Luckily enough the ace Norfolk book gave directions to a good spot and I parked up on the verge next to an impressive Church with a thatched roof. Even though the villages in Norfolk are relatively small the Churches are all massive which doesn't seem to make much sense really.



We walked up the footpath, bordering the surrounding fields and saw our first **Yellowhammer** of the trip. It was sunny again so the path was caked in Common Darters warming themselves up and the wasps were out in force again. We reached the part of the path which branches off to the scrape but there was a sign up telling us that it was closed for maintenance work. Just our luck again! This place had sounded really interesting to me and I'd been keen to see it for myself.....Grrrrrr! So after wasting all that time we had to turn around and left at 3.21pm to go to nearby Hickling.

We arrived at Hickling NWT at 3.37pm and we'd been hoping to see Swallow-tailed Butterflies or some new Dragon/Damselflies there. It was cold, overcast and windy so we just knew that it would be a no go but we had a wander anyway. We walked out to the first hide where there was nothing but a Little Egret, a coot and a swift flying around. Our memories of this place were of taking pics of numerous Dragonflies on fence posts and Lizards on the boardwalk whilst being eaten alive by midgies but it felt too cold today for any of that. There were a few Lizards out though and loads of Common Darters despite the bad weather. It started raining again so we sat in the second hide waiting for it to ease off so we could get back to the car without being soaked for a second time in one day! The total lack of bird life here was a downer so we called it a day and left at 4.52pm.

Having spent another day traipsing about and finding next to nothing we were yet again very tired, depressed & hungry. We couldn't be bothered with the hassle of cooking and our food supplies were anything but inspiring so we decided to treat ourselves (or should I say console ourselves) to a meal out. We'd never stayed in Stiffkey before but the local pub 'The Stiffkey Red Lion' always looked popular as we'd driven past so we went there. We arrived at 6.05pm and it was nice and quiet, just how we like it. After a very nice meal, although I think the Cod was trying to kill me with the 3 massive bones I found in it, and a drink we were back at H.Q by 7pm. As it was a nice evening I thought it would be a good idea to go back to Cley to chance some video while Wendy had a shower and chilled out. Even though it was quite late it was only 10 minutes away so I headed back into Bishops hide hoping that the Curlew and Green Sandpipers there would come a bit closer. Unfortunately by the time I got there the light had faded and most birds were already roosting out on the islands so I had a go at a HDR shot from the hide and went back to H.Q.





While I was out and Wendy was looking for bats in the garden a Hobby blasted over the house and the Tawny Owl was calling again.

Tuesday 6th September

After her lie in yesterday Wendy was up at 5.47am! She hadn't planned it to work out like that as there were gales and rain forecast for today. I got up at the much more sociable hour of 7.30am and looked at the grim picture outside. We took our time this morning, which gave me a chance to check BirdGuides for any reports while Wendy had begun the mammoth task of writing this trip report. My jaw hit the floor when I saw a report of Pectoral Sandpiper at Rush Hill Scrape, where we'd been (but not seen) yesterday! That would have been a brilliant bird for us to see but a bit confusing as to how someone had got in there to find it. We couldn't help but wonder if we'd have found it ourselves had the path been open. Hmmmm....if only but probably not! I also emailed the woman in charge of the cottage to ask where the microwave was and how to work the heating. We'd spent a very cold evening in there last night, as the heating was still set for warm summer days, and didn't fancy doing it again. We left H.Q at 9.20am armed with base layers, hats and gloves, by which time the rain had stopped and headed to Blakeney for the most important task of the day.....coffee fix. On the way back to the car after being in the Deli Wendy found yet another frog in the middle of the road! She quickly picked it up and relocated it somewhere more suitable.....it's probably still wandering around aimlessly, totally lost and wondering where it is today :P.

We parked up by the entrance to Friary Hills so that Wendy could actually drink her coffee for a change instead of throwing it all over herself on the bumpy roads. We thought we might as well have a look in the bushes while we were there, as they have been good for migrants in the past, although seemingly not when we're there.



It was cold and still very windy, in totally the wrong direction of course, so we weren't optimistic. As we worked our way along the path we felt totally depressed and all we could find was a Lesser Whitethroat and a Chiffchaff. Wendy spotted a feathery heap on the ground and we went over to check it out. It was a baby Wood Pigeon with a gammy eye, probably blown out of its nest in the gales. She picked it up to move it out of harms way but it wriggled its way out of her hands. At least we knew it had the energy to do so which was a good sign. I got hold of it and put it under the hedge so we left it there for its parents to hopefully find and continue to feed. We'd had enough by this point and gave up....if only we could have had some easterly winds, we'd have been tripping over birds! We left at 10.35am and stopped off at Salthouse as we thought Gramborough Hill would be worth a go. We were nearly blown off our feet as we walked over the top of the shingle ridge and I couldn't resist getting some video of Wendy being blown to bits. We saw loads of Sandwich and Common Terns feeding along the shoreline but nothing else. On the hill itself were a pair of **Stonechat** and flocks of Linnet and Goldfinch flying in to shelter in the bushes but yet again the area was dead.....Urrghhhh! We left at 11.30am and the rain had started again but it wouldn't matter too much as we were going to Titchwell and could shelter in the hides if necessary.

We arrived at Titchwell at 12.20pm and thought we'd better have our lunch before heading out. We were roasting in the car and the sky was threatening to get sunny so the first job was to go to the toilets to remove the base layers. I'd been looking forward to going back to Titchwell since last year when they were in the process of building the new 'Parrinder Hide' and creating a new muddy edge outside the 'Island Hide' which would bring the birds in closer than at any other reserve.





The work was complete apart from the breaching of the sea wall, which was due to take place the following day. As we walked down the footpath we saw a Chiffchaff and a Siskin and there were huge shoals of Rudd at the surface of the pools amongst the reeds. Where were the Otters to eat them? That's what we wanted to know!

We were in the Island Hide by 1.30pm and could see Ruff, 8 x Curlew Sandpipers, 2 x Little Stints, the usual and more common waders and we also added **Shelduck** to our list. The hide was full of birders and it became apparent that some of them were sniffing and coughing like there was some kind of 'Birder Flu' going round. This was not we wanted, topping off our altogether disappointing trip with a cold.....Urrghhhh! It's often quite funny if you overhear some of the conversations that go on amongst these people, "Oh yes, it was definitely a juvenile Mopopolese Warbler of the Eastern race which I easily separated from the almost identical Pinocchio Warbler." and "When I was in Outer Mongolia I discovered a totally new species of massive Tit which I'm proud to say has been named after me, it's called the Billy Bull Tit." Haha. It's usually the well-spoken retired gentleman type too who obviously have too much time on their hands. There's another 'type' too like the man who noticed a flock of Linnets fly in and proceeded to announce it by saying, "There's a flock of Linnet sized birds, they're calling like Linnets but they could be Twite!" This 'type' never fails to cheer us up. A flock of 14 Golden Plover flew over closely followed by another flock of 150+, which eventually decided to settle on the flats. I got a bit excited, as big Golden Plover flocks always need checking for an American. As we scanned through them all a woman (who had been loudly patronising everyone around her earlier) shouted out at the top of her voice, "I've got a Grey, there's a Grey Plover at the back, just next to the Gull that's on it's own in front of the grass!" We all had a good look and that would be a great bird for our trip but it turned out to be a **Knot**. One of the most common waders in Norfolk.....good skills :-/.

We'd heard enough by now so we left and headed for the beach to see if we could get a bit of a Seawatch in. On the path, which overlooks the fresh marsh, Wendy brilliantly picked out 3 **Yellow Wagtails** that were skulking in the vegetation. I managed a distant record shot.



We counted 8 in total and had our best ever views of Yellow Wags so we were happy with that. We'd been getting worried as it looked as if we weren't going to see any on this trip. At the new Parrinder hide, which to be honest is a 'modern' concrete mess, we saw another Green Sandpiper and an Avocet but that was all. A bloke then approached me and asked if I knew why the beach had been closed earlier. Apparently there had been an Ambulance and Police vans down there but nobody knew why. He seemed quite shifty and I wondered if he was one of those serial killers, who tries to be clever and throw people off the scent.....or if we'd missed out on some drama? Maybe a fight broke out with the seawatchers over the ID of a shearwater and someone had been beaten to death! By the time we got there the beach was open again and we found out that someone had discovered an unexploded WW2 bomb and dragged it up onto the Titchwell path.....Nutter! We joined the other birders and sat on the dunes so we could try to stay sheltered but the sand was blowing in our eyes and crunching in our teeth.....Yuk! There didn't look as though there was much going on out there and we were told we'd just missed an Arctic Skua tormenting the Terns, really close in, by about a minute....typical. We then spotted 2 birds flying over the water and saw that they were Great-crested Grebes. A **Grey Plover** blasted past like it was on a mission, some **Sanderling** flew in and landed on the shoreline and we found a **Red-breasted Merganser** out with the Grebes. It was so windy it was unpleasant and there wasn't much else out there so we decided to make our way back to the visitor centre for some toast and a coffee for the addict. Unfortunately one member of the team failed to get very far ;).





We left at 3.55pm so thought we'd pay Wareham Greens another visit. On the way we caught up the massive Golden Plover flock, which was now taking a break in a field. I thought that instead of walking to the whirly gig from the car park again we could try driving down one of the 2 tracks and approach it from the other side. The only problem was which track to go down, as only 1 of them is suitable for vehicles (not sure what they class as vehicles though.....maybe a tank?). I picked the right one but half way down I was starting to regret my idea. I could hear the paintwork of my car being scratched by the overhanging brambles, the car was grounding every 5 yards and we thought it was going to topple over on more than one occasion but we finally parked up at 4.30pm....Phew! We looked and listened, but there was nothing, it was totally dead! We passed the fallen tree where I lost my favourite cap 2 years ago and for a second I optimistically thought I might find it hanging on a branch all dirty and rotten....but I didn't. After walking all the way over to the whirly gig we were really flagging and had found nothing apart from another Blackcap so we dragged ourselves back to the car for me to tackle the track again. I really must make a note to not bother next time. We'd nearly got to the top when Wendy asked if we'd seen Grey Partridge here before which surprised me. Wendy isn't blessed with the best sense of direction but she was right, we had! We looked through the entrance to every field and eventually saw 4 x **Grey Partridge** poke their heads up from the stubble.....Cool. I tried to get a pic but they were too far away and there wasn't enough light so I only ended up with a record shot.

The first time I stayed in Norfolk it was at the 'Kings Arms Pub' in Blakeney and Wendy has always pestered me to go there. As we had to go into the town to get some supplies from the Spar and couldn't be bothered cooking again we decided to give it a go. We arrived at 5.38pm very tired and wind burnt but found a table in a dark corner to relax at. It was fairly quiet when we went in but it soon filled up with people and we enjoyed another nice meal without any hassle.

We arrived back at H.Q at 6.45 to find an email about the problems in the cottage. We were told that the microwave was in the larder (a totally different room to the kitchen) and to fire up the log burner in the living room for more heat. I set about getting a fire started but couldn't see how it was going to heat the upstairs at all. We were a lot warmer than we'd been on previous nights though but just wished we could work out how to get the heating on when we wanted it.

Later on there were 2 x Tawny Owls calling to each other and I tried but failed to get some video of the bats in the garden. The log burner had worked a treat downstairs but the bedroom still felt like a deep freeze but, as usual, as soon as our heads hit the pillows we were asleep.

Wednesday 7th September

Wendy surfaced at 5.45am to find a nice sunny day although the wind was still strong. I was up at 7.30am and thought that as it was a dry day we'd head for the Broads area, as I wanted to visit Strumpshaw Fen after reading about it in my 'Best Birdwatching Sites in Norfolk' book. Like every morning before we went out I checked BirdGuides for any reports from the previous day and as usual there was nothing local of any interest. There was however now a Wryneck in Doncaster, which I discovered was right by the A1m which we travel up on the way back to Heysham. If it stayed there it could well be our holiday saviour the way things were going. It looked as though we needed nothing short of a miracle if either of us were going to get even one lifer out of our whole weeks efforts! Our enthusiasm was now at an all time low after we read that the weather conditions weren't going to improve for the rest of our trip.....Urrghhh. We left H.Q at 8.23am and on the track out we found a dead young Wood Pigeon in the road that must've also been blown out of the nest in the gales.

Driving through Buxton with Lamas (great name) we pulled over to watch a female Roe Deer with 3 young grazing in a field. We arrived at Strumpshaw Fen at 9.58am and were met by a huge lorry and a woman with 2 horses causing a traffic jam on the lane. I stopped the car and waited for the lorry to move which took about 15 minutes. In the meantime a guy, with apparently no patience, drove straight past me and squeezed in front of the woman with the horses (who was at the front of the queue!), freaking them out, and parked up! The woman shouted, "Don't be silly" at him so he jumped out of his car and started a slanging match with her! I thought about getting out and saying something but decided to give a black eye a miss :). The guy carried on regardless, put on his walking boots, got his camera and bins out of his car and waltzed off up a lane.....if anyone's going to give birders a bad name it's him! After that bit of action we got our stuff together and entered the reserve, which was proving to be quite popular. At the reception area we were told from the hide there a Kingfisher had been performing brilliantly... we had a look and as usual the bird must have sensed us coming so all we got to see was the branch it had been sitting on....Dohh.



Just past the entrance there was a woodland and over it were 4 x Hobbies so even though it was cold and very windy it still looked as if there were Dragonflies about. We heard another Reed Warbler in



the bushes and there was a Marsh Harrier floating about. We walked up the footpath to the first hide and found a nice Comma Butterfly and the reeds were teaming with Common Darters and Migrant Hawkers.

We made ourselves comfortable in the Fen Hide and Wendy instantly spotted another Green Sandpiper. There were branches positioned in the pool for the Kingfishers again but as usual there was no sign of the birds. There was absolutely nothing else apart from Cormorants....which the other birders were getting very excited about! On our way back down the track we noticed a massive Dragonfly, which looked very brown so we watched it for a few seconds until it vanished. We had another tantalising view a few minutes later and saw a brown tint to its wings and we thought, "Errr could this be a Brown Hawker?" Sure enough after a check in my Dragonflies app on my phone we could confirm we had just seen another lifer for us both.....Great stuff! After that bit of excitement we made our way to the Tower Hide, which as the name suggests, is a hide built on stilts overlooking the reed beds and pools. We had seen a Common Tern feeding over this pool from the Fen Hide and could now see that it was feeding a chick just in front of us but behind a bank. There were a good few people in the hide but no birds of note and yet again these birders were also very excited by the Cormorants! Deciding that there was little point hanging round we made our way back to the car park and as we walked through the wooded area near the visitor we heard an unusual call. We looked up to see a very nice **Marsh Tit** in with the tit flock. This was great as after failing to see the Weeting birds we thought we'd also missed out on Marsh Tit this time around. I followed them to the feeders by the visitor centre and checked them for Willow Tit as they have been recorded there but not recently.

We went back to the car for lunch as it was now 12.38pm but I still had another trick up my sleeve. There was a track, which lead to a place noted from a recent message on BirdGuides as having Willow Emerald Damselflies. As we ate our sarnies the impatient road rage guy from earlier returned to his car with a massive handful of green beans, which we thought was quite strange in the middle of nowhere. He came from the Damselfly track so we were relieved to see he wasn't a birder after all. We also saw another Brown Hawker and a Sparrowhawk, which was good lunchtime entertainment. After recharging we set off up the track hoping to see something new but with the strong wind we felt uncertain. There was nothing about as we headed towards our site and when we arrived there was a guy already at the ditch. We didn't even know that there was such a thing as Damselfly 'Twitchers' but apparently there is! We had a wander up and down the ditch



but it must have been too cold due to the strong wind. He'd seen nothing either so, after what felt like hours, we gave up and headed back to the car. On the way we found what looked like a Badger Set in a bank.....Cool.



We also solved the green bean mystery too when we found a wooden box outside a house with 'Help yourself' written on it. How nice to think that someone grows their own veggies and offers them out free to passers by :). Wendy took some green beans and the last courgette, stuffed them into her rucksack and we said "thanks" to the garden, as there was no one about.

We left Strumpshaw Fen at 2.25pm and arrived at nearby Upton Fen at 2.44pm seeing only a Kestrel on the way. This place was noted in our book as being terrible for mosquitoes and it advised plenty of DEET as they were, "the most vicious and blood thirsty" the author had ever come across. Aarrghhhh.....they were going to make mincemeat out of us as we'd left the 'Jungle Formula' insect repellent back at the cottage! Straight away we spotted a Hobby and followed the footpath through some woods. The area was very marshy under foot and the ground was covered in thick moss.





There were ditches full of water where there were Dragonflies and of course mozzies so we hurried along hoping they wouldn't notice us. All of a sudden I spotted something ahead of me and shrieked, "Wendy, Wendy, **Grass Snake!**" Wendy came bounding over and we watched it slither along the ground and up a tree. By the time I'd got my lens changed to my macro it had disappeared into the ivy so I didn't get a shot of it, which was disappointing as we've never been so close to a Grass Snake before. We also found another frog hopping along the path. The woods then opened out into some reed beds and as we rounded a corner a Deer jumped out of the reeds and onto the track ahead. It looked startled to see us coming towards it and made a rapid leap straight back in the way it had come. It was a **Chinese Water Deer**, which was yet another non-bird lifer for us both. I'd read that there were Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers in the woods which would be brilliant.....but it wasn't going to happen. We were now heading back to the car but had become slightly lost, as we'd wandered off course somewhere along the line. We followed the smell of a nearby fire and luckily found some NWT volunteers who were clearing an area and burning the cuttings. When we go away we always play a game which is virtually impossible.....'spot the fit birder' :P. So far Wendy was winning 1-0 as she had found one such rarity in the form of a young German Warden when we were at Haweswater looking for Ring Ouzel. She was now looking very smug to have found another young student type of similar appearance using his muscles to do some hard manual labour.....it was now 2-0! I think she's been getting ideas from the American program 'Cougars' even though she's never watched it ;P This is what happens when there are no birds about.....Ha ha it's a sad life! We asked him for directions back to the car and finally sat down, miraculously free from mozzie bites, at 3.35pm.

Our next location was Cockshoot Broad, not because there was anything of outstanding interest there but because it had a funny name :P. I parked the car up next to the river and we got out for a wander around. In the book it said that driving down to the car park was a game of 'dodge the Black-tailed Skimmer Dragonflies' but we didn't even see one.....Grrrr! There were a lot of boats chugging backwards and forwards and we noticed that the houses on the other side had a garage....not for their car but for their boat!



The Pub was busy with people who'd moored up, presumably on holiday, and were relaxing with a drink in the Beer Garden. One thing that was obvious is that the average age of the people was about 70 and there were no other birders about. Normally when we visit a place in Norfolk we are in the majority but here we were definitely the only ones. The people we passed on our walk were out for a stroll, dressed up for going out to have their evening meal and absolutely stank of perfume/aftershave! This kind of gave us a clue that we weren't going to see anything so we didn't hang around for long. We saw the usual Hobby and a Marsh Harrier and left at 4.32pm to head back to H.Q for tea and to get the log burner lit so we didn't freeze.

Thursday 8th September

Wendy woke up at stupid o'clock so dozed until 6.25am and I got up at 7.20am. The weather was grey, overcast and still windy so we had no idea what we were going to do today. There didn't seem much point in us rushing out for nothing. I checked BirdGuides and the Wryneck was still in Doncaster and there was a reported Citrine Wagtail at Daukes Hide, Cley.....this was looking more like it! I then read a thread about the Wagtail on bird forum but everyone was saying that it was a string, so I thought that rather than head straight there we would wait to see if another report of it came in today. We decided to go and check out Wells Woods first and set off at 8.30am making an unexpected diversion to Burnham Deepdale for petrol. It took 30 minutes to get there and Wendy made use of this stop off, while I filled up, and got herself a coffee from the Café next door. It was a bit annoying that we'd had to do this but if we hadn't we wouldn't have seen a **Stoat** running across the road ahead of us on the way back.....Brilliant! :).

The rain had just started as we were pulling up in Wells Woods car park at 9.30am but we weren't going to let that stop us. This was our last full day in Norfolk so we wanted to make the most of it. There were 3 x Little Grebes on the first pool we came to and luckily the rain had stopped again. When we entered the woods it was silent, not a sound, apart from the barking of dogs being walked. We scanned the trees for any signs of life but there was nothing. We'd had Pied Flycatcher in there 2 years ago and had hoped for at least something today. After a while we heard a mixed Tit and Crest flock high up in the branches and one of them sounded like it could be a Firecrest. This would be a good find but the birds were so high up we just couldn't see them well enough to make a positive identification....Urrghhh! The last 2 times we'd been here we thought we'd found the infamous 'drinking pool' but had found out later that we'd been looking in the wrong place. This time however



we found it but it had dried up so there was nothing there.....Grrrrr! It was especially annoying as someone had taken a pic of a Southern Hawker laying eggs there only a week earlier. At least we know where to look next time though. Wendy finally found a **Treecreeper** and a **Jay**, which we thought we'd have seen days ago and we watched a Grey Squirrel climbing about in a tree. Yet again despite our best efforts there was nothing about so we went to the Café for an early lunch. We sat in the car and ate our extortionately expensive sarnies and I had a quick look at BirdGuides. There was another report today of the Wagtail from Daukes Hide and also a Cattle Egret had turned up in a ditch at Wiveton Marshes which is next to Cley.....so off we went at 11.25am.

We arrived at Cley at 11.57am and headed straight for Daukes Hide where there were only a couple of others, talking about having seen the Wagtail earlier and of course boasting about all birds they'd seen elsewhere in the world. When we looked out there were Wagtails everywhere, some very distant, but no matter how hard we looked, they were all just Pied :(. There were still a few Green Sandpipers around and one managed to come a bit closer to the hide, which allowed me to get a shot. Again it was further away than I'd have liked but even so it's my best Green Sandpiper photo to date.



We overheard 2 blokes saying that the bird had last been seen nearer to the hide next door so we moved to Avocet Hide. This hide was full so we stood at the back trying to get a clear view through all the blokes who were standing up with their scopes. There were 4 very odd looking types, sitting in prime position, opening their foil wrapped sarnies and the rest of their huge spread, taking up half the hide in the process! All of a sudden one of the women jumped up out of her seat, tapped her Husband/Dad on the shoulder and charged over to the left hand window in the corner. All 4 of them were now hogging the window and looking at something in their bins....but still not saying what! Wendy jumped up and stood on the bench so she could see over everyone's heads but all she could see was a Green Sandpiper which surely wouldn't have caused such a frenzy, but you never know. I stood up behind her and managed to stick my head in a massive spiders web....Doh! A bloke next to me asked me what they were looking at but I had to shrug, as I didn't know, they hadn't said. Fed up with all these people blocking the corner of the hide I thought I would go back next door maybe we could view from there. The second I walked in it felt much calmer and there was a guy reeling off a

commentary of where to find the wagtail. It was deep in some long grass but suddenly I had a glimpse of its face! My happiness quickly turned to panic as I realised that Wendy was still next door. I legged it back along the boardwalk. One flustered looking bloke had also gone back to get his mate and I was relieved to see them running back in with Wendy not far behind them. Luckily she'd realised what was going on and shifted herself pretty quickly. Amazingly there was no big push and scrum in this hide and there was a gap to sit down right at the side where the bird was! Now we just needed it to come out from the long grass as we just kept getting flashes of various sections of it. After an agonising wait of about 1 minute, which felt more like 30, the **Citrine Wagtail** walked right out into the open giving perfect views for everyone. I started to rattle off the shots whilst Wendy in the background was saying, "GO ON GO ON!" egging me on to get about 2 billion shots of the bird. We couldn't believe that we'd managed to get us both a lifer and on the second to last day too :). I managed to get a shot of it but it wasn't easy with all the vegetation it was sculking behind but I'm happy with it. I did of course manage to mess up the photo where it was in the best pose though...Urrghhh.



We couldn't stay at Cley all day as our next plan was to see if we could find the Cattle Egret, which would be another good bird for the trip so we left at 1.25pm. The directions from the Cley reserve volunteer were not the same as what was on the BirdGuides app so we thought maybe the locals could give us some clues and went over to look from the West bank. We could see several birders gathered on the next bank over which matched the BirdGuides directions so we drove to Wiveton Marshes and arrived at 1.41pm. We had never walked down this way before but had always admired the Cley Windmill and wanted a photo of it. It seems impossible to photograph from the main road but from this path we had a great view. It's actually a pretty impressive collection of a B&B, self-catering apartments and a restaurant now and we were looking back at it without the obstacles in the way. Wendy couldn't resist a pic.....like we had all the time in the world! :P





The birders were still standing further down the bank so we got our skates on to join them and asked if they'd seen the Egret. Fortunately it was still there, miles off and behind a gatepost but we could see it was a **Cattle Egret** all the same. We watched for a couple of minutes before it took off, flew over us and disappeared somewhere near to Cley north bank.....Phew, that was lucky!



It seemed unsettled and we all waited for a while to see if it would move off again but after a while we called it a day and left at 2.18pm. We went straight to the North Hide to try our luck and caught up with the 4 weirdos from our Citrine Wagtail experience.....great! As we staggered over the shingle we saw 2 x **Wheatear** on the path and 8 x **Common Scoter** flying over the sea but nothing new from the hide itself. We were back at the car by 3.15pm and headed over to Kelling Quags. We arrived 10 minutes later and set off down the footpath towards the pool seeing another Comma on the way. We have a love hate relationship with Kelling Quags.....the area seems to always get amazing things so we cant help but go for a look but repeatedly we see very little! The pool was busier than we've ever seen it before though with Lapwing, Ruff, and a Sandwich Tern in amongst the Black-headed Gulls. We could hear a Chiffchaff too and further up the track heading towards the beach were 4 x **Stonechat** in a field. By now it was really warm and we were absolutely worn out, a week of early starts and relentless but unproductive birding had finally caught up with us. Our spirits were lifted by finding a lone **Whinchat** with the 3 x Wheatear in a field near the shingle ridge. Seeing as we'd got this far I wanted to check out an area, a bit further east, which I'd spotted on Google earth. It looked quite good with a pool and bushes and we'd never checked it out before (or seen any mention of it on the birding websites) so I was keen to at least give it a chance. Wendy didn't share my enthusiasm however and wanted to pack it in for the day and go for tea somewhere to relax but I won :P. As we trudged across the shingle we could hear something, which sounded like someone's gadget was running out of batteries. After checking all our kit was ok we were well confused. Wendy suggested that maybe someone had dropped their phone in the grass, so we started checking though the scrub. After about 10 minutes with no luck I suddenly realised it was being broadcast from the nearby army building!!! Doh ....I just hope they don't have CCTV around there because we would have looked like a right pair of plums!

On the track going back to the car we were accosted by a couple but the man was very interested in my camera and lens. He asked did I get pics of the Citrine Wagtail so I told him I had and was quite pleased with it and went to show him. He looked, went "hmm" then grabbed the camera out of my hand and proceeded to poke and prod at the buttons claiming he owned a 7d but had forgotten how to zoom in and out when viewing pics...Wendy was a bit putback by the man's forwardness and I was a little but I was also happy to see someone with that much interest in photography so it wasn't too bad.

We eventually got back to the car at 5.15pm and drove straight to The Dun Cow Pub in Salthouse. When we came to Norfolk in September last year this was where we'd picked our keys up for the cottage and our local, so we knew it was going to do the job.....which it did :).

We were back at H.Q by 6.20pm and while Wendy set about packing up our stuff I decided it would be a good idea to leave her to it (she told me to get out of her way! :) ) and went back to Cley to see if the Citrine Wagtail was showing any better for a photo. Nothing showed and the place was dead so I was back by 7.50pm.

Later on we couldn't resist going outside to hear the Tawny Owl calling for the last time but this time there were at least 4 in the area. I checked BirdGuides again to see if the Wryneck was still in Doncaster, which it was, but the question on both our minds was.....would it would stay overnight, if it did then surely it wouldn't leave during the day and we would finally get to see our dream bird. Wryneck was the main reason we'd come to Norfolk earlier this year after all but all we could do was cross our fingers and hope.

Friday 9th September

The weather outside was yet again grey and overcast but thankfully the wind had died down so it looked like our crossing wasn't going to be the white knuckle ride we'd envisaged.....Phew! Wendy was up at 6.05am and I was not long behind her, although we should have stayed in bed as we had a long day ahead of us. I had a quick check of BirdGuides which revealed nothing on the Wryneck front but there was a Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Cattle Egret at Titchwell so that was our first plan of action sorted. By the time we'd got ourselves together and loaded up the car it had turned into the sunniest, warmest day since we'd arrived.....any sane Wryneck would surely take advantage of the clear sky and clear off, especially from Doncaster! We said goodbye to our H.Q and drove away at 8.40am to start a day, which wasn't going to end until 2.15am the next morning.

We pulled over into a layby at Burnham Overy Staithe when something caught our eye clumsily launching itself over the road. We had come across a big flock of Grey and Red-legged Partridge in the field next to us but they were all too spooked to get a shot and within no time had all run off to hide in the stubble. A Buzzard floated over, which reminded us that we hadn't seen many of these birds at all during the week and we hoped it was due to the strong winds and not anything more sinister.

By 9.20am we were parking up at Titchwell again and as we walked along the paths we heard another Cetti's Warbler blasting out from the bushes and the Beardies were flying about everywhere. We were stopped a couple of times on the way to the Parrinder Hide by staff members who were informing people of the birds we'd come to see. We thought it was really nice of them to be so helpful as we'd never experienced this anywhere else before. At the concrete block that is the Parrinder hide we looked out over the mud and could just about make out a very distant **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**, which was just as far off as any of the others we'd seen before. I'd been quite hopeful this would be our best view of one as the reports from the day before said things like 'crippling views' and 'right in front of the hide'.... Dohh. The Cattle Egret was equally as distant so I knew it wasn't going to be possible to get any pics of the birds so we didn't hang about. We made our way back to the car and came across a baby toad on the footpath and a lovely looking summer plumage Little Grebe in a pool. We left at 10.33am to pay the usual sites we go to on the way out of Norfolk a visit.

First off was Choseley Drying Barns, which was only 6 minutes away, and on first glances the area appeared to be dead. I was about to get back in the car but Wendy wanted to have a wander down the road to check the hedge. We followed a finch flock, which consisted of Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Linnet and a solitary Yellowhammer down the road but this was not what we'd come here for. Then I heard it....a sound like jangling keys so our patience had paid off. There was a bird sitting on the overhead cables so we checked it and sure enough it was a **Corn Bunting**....excellent. We left at 10.56am to try one of our favourite sites, Flitcham Abbey Farm and we arrived in the car park at 11.22am. This is a great place that a local farmer has set up which was almost a dead cert for Little Owl, Kingfisher and Turtle Dove so always worth a check. We entered the hide to find a very nice, friendly gentleman in there already. We scanned the field, the dead tree and all the fence posts but there was no sign of the Little Owl....Urrghhh! Nor too was there any sign of the Turtle Doves but we saw **Stock Dove** having a drink from the stream. We checked the log-book and were disappointed to see that none of our target birds had been seen much recently and that also, due to the lack of rain, the water levels were exceptionally low at the moment. Maybe this was the reason for the lack of activity. Up to this point all checks of BirdGuides app had come up with no reports of the Wryneck but I couldn't help but look again. Our moods instantly picked up when I saw that the report we were waiting for had been put up. 'Wryneck, Doncaster, showing well again in brambles at 11.40am.' This was our cue to leave and we said bye to the nice man and wished him luck in seeing the Little Owl. We left at 12.32pm with our fingers crossed, our legs crossed and finally with a bit of optimism.

We stopped off at a picnic site in Dersingham for a W.C break and lunch, followed by some services. There was quite a bit of traffic up the A1m but we eventually arrived in Doncaster at 3.17pm. I parked the car at the side of the road in an area that actually looked surprisingly nice. There were brand new apartment blocks and shopping malls built over the road from a huge lake, which was full of Ducks, Swans, Geese and Little and Great-crested Grebes. We could see the grassy hill where we would be going for the Wryneck but there didn't look like there were any people up there to give us any clues as to where it was. We followed the path round the lake and walked up the hill where we were relieved to find some other birders standing around.....looking very bored. One guy had been there for over an hour and was just packing up and the 2 others had seen it yesterday but so far, not today. It looked like we were in for a long wait.....Urrghhhh! Another bloke joined us who hadn't been able to get there until now and we all stood staring at the bushes hoping to see some kind of movement.





Apparently the bird was showing incredibly well the day before and, as we'd seen on BirdGuides, there were some excellent pics of it. We knew we couldn't afford to stay all day but we wanted to see a Wryneck more than anything so we decided to sit it out for as long as it would take. The sun was beating down on us and we were absolutely boiling by now and this scenario was not what I'd expected....at all. All the pics you see online are of Wrynecks sitting in the open, I had just assumed we would turn up and the bird would be there. I mentioned this to the bloke next to me who said, "Oh no, Wrynecks are horrific skulkers." Omg ....trust us to dream after a difficult bird :(. After about an hour and a half a very determined woman came stomping up the hill and took up her position amongst the rest of us. Literally 5 minutes later we saw a fleeting glimpse of a brown bird which flew between 2 bushes and the woman called out, "Did you see it.....that was it!" We couldn't believe that she'd only just arrived and seen it.....that's jamminess to rival even a certain Brian Liggins we think :P. Having seen no features of this supposed Wryneck (it looked much smaller than we were expecting) we certainly couldn't claim it so we stayed put in the hope that it had woken up and would now become more active. This was wishful thinking however and yet again the brambles were lifeless. We'd lost all hope but stuck it out until 5pm when we finally gave up and reluctantly started our walk back to the car. We were hot, tired and hungry but had to crack on to our next site in Lancashire before it was too dark to see. After eating the last of the sarnies we'd made for the day we drove away.....extremely depressed and couldn't help but think that we should've stayed for a bit longer and maybe even completely ditch the next stop.

On the way to Lancashire we stopped off at a Services at 6.25pm for a W.C and coffee break and while Wendy was inside I checked BirdGuides again only to find out that the Wryneck had been reported at 5.20pm, just 20 minutes after we'd left.....Aarghhhhhh!!!! That was a massive stab in the guts and just to twist the knife further there was also now a Little Bittern at Titchwell, in the reeds where we'd been watching the fish earlier today.....Nooooooooo!!!! We'd left Titchwell literally 30 minutes before it was found, you couldn't make this stuff up. This was just typical of our luck! Ah well, it was too late now so everything was pinned on our last target of the trip, if we could there in time.

We were making good progress until we hit a massive traffic jam on the M62.

We eventually arrived at Alston Reservoirs at 7.40pm where there was a long staying Black-necked Grebe and also a few Black Terns but due to the unforeseen delays the light was fading fast and the

bats were already out. To make matters worse, what looked like the gate to the entrance was covered in barbed wire and padlocked with a huge sign saying, "No public access under any circumstances." We walked down the muddy track and found a gate in field full of cows, which appeared to be a way in to view the reservoir. It was dark, mucky and we were both losing the will after our Wryneck disaster so Wendy decided to throw a Karl Pilkington style strop and refused to go any further. She went back to the car, even though this bird would have been another lifer for her, but I wasn't going to give up that easily and wanted to try to 'save the day' so off I went through the field. To say that it was a muddy field would be an understatement, my feet were disappearing into the mushy ground. At one point I very nearly fell over backwards, into 3 feet deep mud and cow poo, trying to use a barbed view fence to traverse a 2 inch ledge! I finally realised that there was no way on earth I was going to find a way to get anywhere near the water so had to turn back empty handed. I got quite mad about this and loudly ranted at the nearby farmhouse as I blamed the farmer for the state of the public footpath :). Also it made me wonder, why report a bird somewhere with no public access in the first place? If there is some clever way in to view it, it would have been very handy to have included this info in the report. Back at the car I was slightly envious as Wendy had written her diary and was warm and dry listening to a Tawny Owl and watching bats. I, on the other hand, had seen nothing and was so filthy I had to change my trousers and boots before going any further. We packed our bins away as it was now pitch black and left at 8.25pm to head for our last stop of the day. By now my petrol was getting low but it looked as though there'd easily be enough to reach the Heysham Asda to get the obligatory cheap petrol fill up.

Driving towards Arnside I was horrified to see that the narrow, windey lane driving had decimated my petrol and there was no way going to be enough to reach Heysham....Oh flip! I used my phone to google some petrol stations but it was hard to see which were 24 hours so Wendy said she would ask in the pub we were going to go to. We had hoped to arrive at 'The Albion' in time to have some food but when we rolled up it was 9.25pm and the kitchen was closed. We settled for sharing a packet of scampi fries a having a couple of drinks to kill some time before the 2.15am boat. Although it was May, when we were last there it felt strangely familiar and, just as we had then, we were finding it very difficult to stay awake. This time, instead of it being quiet and relaxing, it was busy and we felt very out of place in our zombie like states and were finding it hard to string a sentence together. Wendy asked the Landlord where the nearest petrol station (that would be open late) was and we were annoyed to hear that we would have to go back on our tracks 7 miles to Milnthorpe and they also weren't 100% sure if it was open 24 hours.....brilliant. We had a big decision to make when we left did we chance the locals suggestion or did I try to 'hypermile' to Heysham... Eeek! Before that though we tried to have a rest in the pub. We took a seat only to be faced with a well meaning but somewhat worse for wear bloke who told us that getting petrol round there was virtually impossible and made it sound like going on some sort of dangerous expedition...just what we wanted to hear, not! We just about managed not to fall asleep at our table and amused ourselves with the scenarios going on around us but by 10.53pm it looked like the Landlord wanted to close so we left. I decided to stick with what the locals said and chanced the Milnthorpe petrol station. I couldn't help but query the logistics of how such a tiny village could have a 24 hour garage but thankfully at 11.20pm, as we rounded a corner just after the village, there it was shining like an Oasis in the desert...huge relief.

We arrived exhausted at Heysham at 11.52pm, which was a bit early, and we couldn't fight it any longer so we had a nap. It wasn't too long before we had to wake ourselves up and we were boarding at 1.32am. The wind had been extremely strong for the past week so we were very lucky that it had died right down for our crossing. This was possibly the best luck we'd had all week and as soon as we got into bed we were asleep.....until we were woken up by my alarm followed by the passenger announcement that we'd arrived in Douglas. By 5.53am we were off the boat and heading home where Wendy unpacked and I started to go through the photos from our trip. A quick check on BirdGuides showed that there were 9 Spoonbills (there'd been 22 until the week we arrived when there was none) back at Cley, the Little Bittern was showing extremely well at Titchwell and the Wryneck was seen 3 more times after the report at 5.20pm last night and again this morning.....Urrghhhh! Still.....you win some, you lose some (although we mainly lose them all) Maybe next time we might just win :P.

After reading this article you could be forgiven for thinking that we hadn't had the best holiday ever but regardless of the lack of birds we'd had a great time as we always do in North Norfolk. We had gone earlier in the month than ever before in an attempt to hit Wryneck peak week but also to give ourselves a chance of seeing the huge array of Dragonflies and Butterflies that still would be about in

Norfolk. Our plan had backfired though so we probably won't be doing it again and it had cost us a lot more than going later in September. Being earlier meant we were able to explore new places some of which turned out to be good but others we'll be giving a miss in future! Even though it had been windy with frequent showers we still think we were lucky to have escaped with only 1 thorough soaking during the whole week. Even with the poor weather we managed to get to 123 species which isn't bad but isn't good either :). We covered 1,058 miles in total, which is standard for a Norfolk trip for us and goes to show that we certainly put the same amount of work and effort in as usual but failed to get any big rewards....Grrrrr. At the end of our trip though we did manage to scrape 1 bird lifer, 1 mammal lifer, 1 amphibian lifer, 1 Butterfly and 2 Dragonfly lifers. Not that bad I suppose. Bird of the trip had to be the Citrine Wagtail but that's a bit obvious as there was no competition :).

At the end of the day it goes to show that there's very little pattern to the occurrence of scarce birds in Norfolk. For us in the Isle of Man (who can't just take off for a weekend without any notice) we will just have to keep booking in advance and keep our fingers and toes crossed that one day we will finally be there in good weather conditions to experience what the UK's birding mecca truly has to offer.

P.S. Little did we know just how soon we would be crossing our fingers and toes!!!

To be continued..... ;)

Little Grebe	Coot	Common Tern	Willow Warbler
Great Crested Grebe	Eurasian Oystercatcher	Feral Pigeon	Goldcrest
Northern Gannet	Avocet	Stock Dove	Bearded Tit
Atlantic Great Cormorant	Ringed Plover	Woodpigeon	Long-tailed Tit
European Shag	European Golden Plover	Collared Dove	Marsh Tit
<b>Cattle Egret</b>	Grey Plover	Tawny Owl	Coal Tit
Little Egret	Northern Lapwing	Common Swift	Blue Tit
Grey Heron	Knot	Common Kingfisher	Great Tit
Mute Swan	Sanderling	Green Woodpecker	Common Treecreeper
Greylag Goose	Little Stint	Great Spotted Woodpecker	European Jay
Canada Goose	Curlew Sandpiper	Sand Martin	Magpie
Egyptian Goose	Dunlin	Barn Swallow	Jackdaw
Common Shelduck	<b>Buff-breasted Sandpiper</b>	House Martin	Rook
Eurasian Wigeon	Ruff	Meadow Pipit	Carrion Crow
Gadwall	Common Snipe	Yellow Wagtail	Starling
Common Teal	Black-tailed Godwit	<b>Citrine Wagtail</b>	House Sparrow
Mallard	Bar-tailed Godwit	Pied Wagtail	Chaffinch
Northern Pintail	Whimbrel	Wren	Greenfinch
Northern Shoveler	Eurasian Curlew	Duncock	Goldfinch
Common Pochard	Spotted Redshank	European Robin	Eurasian Siskin
Tufted Duck	Common Redshank	Whinchat	Linnet
Common Scoter	Greenshank	Stonechat	Yellowhammer
Red-breasted Merganser	Green Sandpiper	Northern Wheatear	Reed Bunting
Marsh Harrier	Common Sandpiper	Blackbird	Corn Bunting
Sparrowhawk	Turnstone	Song Thrush	
Common Buzzard	Arctic Skua	Mistle Thrush	
Common Kestrel	Little Gull	Cetti's Warbler	
Hobby	Black-headed Gull	Sedge Warbler	
Peregrine	Common Gull	Reed Warbler	
Red-legged Partridge	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Lesser Whitethroat	
Grey Partridge	Herring Gull	Common Whitethroat	
Common Pheasant	Great Black-backed Gull	Blackcap	
Moorhen	Sandwich Tern	Common Chiffchaff	