

# Yorkshire Oct 2017

## PART 2

### Yorkshire

Finally at 3.39pm we arrived at Kilnsea and I drove down to the Crown and Anchor Pub.



Kilnsea

There were a few birders in the car park, so I parked up down the road and we all walked up, so as not to upset anyone. By the time we got there everyone seemed to be dispersing and we started to wonder if the bird had been seen or if it'd already gone.



Pub car park twitch

Nobody was looking at anything and seemed to be just hanging around nattering, so Wendy spoke to a young Geordie bloke who rattled off the words we've become all too familiar with. "It's just been seen a couple of minutes ago but it's gone again." Sometimes you wonder if people are having a joke on you! He then

told us that it was doing a circuit, so would be back and that he'd been there for the past 3 days and had seen it every day. This gave us a bit more hope and we stood around waiting to pick up on any positive signs. There was an eclectic mix of birders in the car park, with a group of older ones seemingly using the twitch as a weekly catch up, as not one of them were looking for the bird. More of a character was an older lady who was, lets just say more than a bit vertically challenged. She was tiny! If that wasn't enough to deal with already we didn't know where to look when she got down on the ground of the car park and started doing the plank! Okaayy.. She turned out to be really nice and came over to make friends with Lyca seeing as there was no sign of the bird. Lyca was rather taken by her too and the lady was more than happy to let her lick her hand AND face.....Ewwwwww!

All of a sudden I spotted a small and interesting looking bird fly in from behind us into the hedgerow in front. Everyone got twitchy at the same time and they rushed over to the hedge and raised their bins so it was all eyes on deck, so to speak. All the big blokes barged in and stood right in front of Wendy as usual, so I told her to go in front of me because she was the shortest person and everyone would be able to see over her. Wendy, without thinking (as usual) said, "No I'm not!" in a really loud voice but instantly regretted it and we cringed as the tiny plank lady looked round at us. Oooops! Even though the hedgerow couldn't have been more than a meter deep it was very difficult to see anything in it. Suddenly a bloke further to the left started firing off shots, which was a bit annoying since he hadn't even thought to mention that the bird was in view.....handy! Luckily someone said to him, "Is it in view?" To which he said, "Yes" and pointed in the general direction. I worked out where it was and found the bird deep in the hedge but it was being very skulky. I checked to see if Wendy had it too but she didn't....Aarrghhh! I had a horrible feeling that it'd keep going and disappear for ages again and we didn't have time for that. I gave her directions to where it was and she finally got it, so after dipping on 3 of these rare birds over the years we were now able to add **Arctic Warbler** to our list and had just got ourselves a lifer. It was a nice little bird and with its massive supercilium, single wing bar and pale belly we were both happy to say we could identify one again if the opportunity arose. Hahaha dream on! It continued to feed amongst the branches of the tree for a while and was showing relatively well (for a skulking warbler), so I handed Lyca over to Wendy and started to fire off some shots.



Arctic Warbler

Wendy wandered around the car park trying to keep Lyca entertained, as she'd started to get restless by then. We couldn't quite believe it but for once we hadn't dipped and we'd gained a lifer for our trip all within 30 minutes :). The bird cleared off again and by 4.25pm there was still no sign of it and we didn't have the time to wait for it to come back, so we headed back to the car. We knew the Red-backed Shrike had gone which was a massive shame as it'd been showing amazingly well really close to the road. The Rose-coloured Starling was still in Easington so on the way through the village we checked the roofs and wires but couldn't see anything. The only thing left for us to do now was get to the cottage, which was still over an hour away. We passed 4x **Roe Deer** in a field but apart from that the drive was pretty non-eventful. It was starting to get quite dark too and the scenery wasn't particularly inspiring. Wendy reckoned that we needed to go to a shop to get something for tea because Tesco wasn't due until 8pm but typically we didn't find one en-route. Having never been in the area before we had no idea where there were any shops apart from the local village store/post office near the cottage in Buckton. All we could do was cross our fingers that it was open and had a decent food section. It was 5.47pm when we drove past the cottage and further down the road we found the local shop, which was of course closed! Buckton was tiny too and so was the shop, so we couldn't imagine it would've been of much use to us anyway. There was a pub but we didn't know if it was dog friendly and I didn't like the look of it at all, so I turned around and drove back up to the road. I turned into the driveway and parked up next to the cottages, which were set in a huge garden overlooking some fields.





HQ garden

There were chickens in a pen and it remained to be seen how mental Lyca was going to go when she spotted them. The owner's house was suitably far enough away from us and as an even bigger bonus there were no other cars parked up, so it looked as though we didn't have any neighbours.....Yey! There were 2 cottages in the grounds and they're joined, so I'd been worried about that especially with having Lyca with us.

At 5.51pm we got out of the car, wandered up the path and poked our heads through the front door for our 1<sup>st</sup> peek inside. The 1<sup>st</sup> thing we noticed was how warm it was, which was great and I left Wendy to it while I went out to get the bags in. Luckily she was happy to find that although it was absolutely tiny it was spotlessly clean and nicely done out....Phew! Queen Wendy approved of the cottage! The small size wasn't a problem to us but with there only being 1 settee it meant Lyca had nowhere to curl up at night and would have to make other arrangements. She seemed happy enough that there was a nice fluffy rug on the floor, so hopefully she'd use that instead. There was only one problem with the cottage and that was that it didn't have a phone but again it was no biggy as the broadband speed there was even quicker than at Moonfleet in Norfolk! It was 40mb down, which was the fastest internet we'd ever had at a holiday cottage, so Wendy would be able to Whatsapp call to her hearts content. After Wendy had unpacked our stuff she went off for a bath and then Whatsapped her Mum. While she was doing that we were taken by complete surprise by Tesco arriving at 7.45pm. They were 15mins early, so Wendy had to take Lyca and her conversation into the bedroom and close the door. Lyca barked so much that she couldn't hear a word of what her Mum was saying but at least we didn't have to wait any longer for our tea. I worked out how to use the oven and stuck the fresh pizza in, which was cooked in no time at all. We finally put our feet up on the reclining settee, which was a nice detail and watched some TV before we were too tired and went off to bed at 10.10pm. Although the bed wasn't quite as comfortable as the one at Moonfleet there wasn't much in it and it was just as big!



It was 7.45am when we woke up after another good nights sleep and looking outside the ground was wet so it'd rained over night. This would have been perfect if it'd been accompanied by easterly winds but as with Norfolk there was just constant brisk westerlies. The worse winds for decent birds in autumn.....Typical! :( There was still some very low cloud cover and it was really misty, windy and cold, so although we couldn't see the view from the cottage it gave us a tiny glimmer of hope that it might've grounded some birds for us to find. There was a **Moorhen** down at the bottom of the garden and after it'd gone I took Lyca out for a wee. She inevitably found the chickens, so pulled me over to investigate them and had a bark before I dragged her away. I looked back at the Cottage and it looked very smart.



HQ (ours was the one on the right)

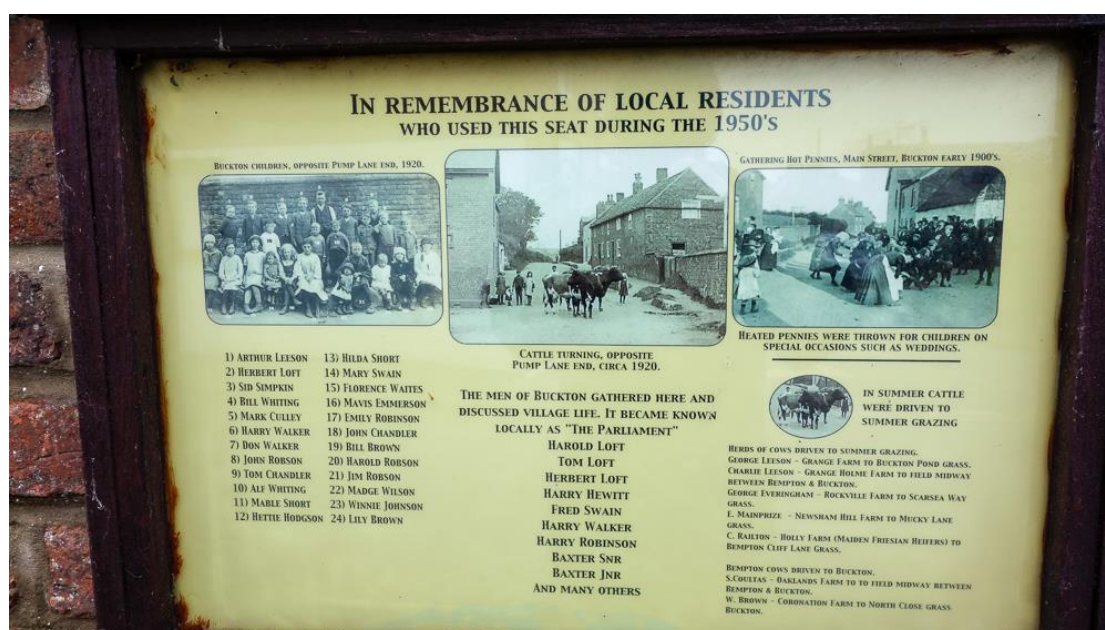
The Chickens were really friendly not to mention vocal and came running over to me probably looking for their breakfast. Wendy had put Lycas breakfast out for her but when she came in she scoffed all the carrots and left the rest.....Urrghhh! She seemed more interested in sleeping on the settee now she had it all to herself or maybe she was fancying chicken for breakfast instead? I had a report of an Arctic Warbler at Easington, so we wondered if it was a different bird to the one at Kilnsea or if that one had relocated. Apart from that it was all worryingly quiet on the reports front even though it was a Sunday and every birder around would've been out. Seeing as we were just beginning a new week in a different place we thought we'd start a new bird list as a comparison of the 2 places and set about seeing what was around. We found a **Dunnoek** at the bottom of the garden, a few **Woodpigeons** were sitting up on the overhead cables and in the field behind the garden we could see **Black-headed Gull**, **Carrion Crow**, **Herring Gull** and **Pheasant**. This was anything but impressive, so we got ourselves ready to go out and do the local walk I'd found on a blog post from an RSPB fella called Mark Thomas, which looked really good. The amount of rarities he'd found on this little walk was mind blowing but unfortunately we stood more chance of winning sixty million quid on the lottery with those winds. Doing the local walk meant that we'd back at HQ for lunch, so Wendy didn't need to make any sarnies. Sorted.

By the time we were setting off it was 9.45am and as we walked up the road we could hear loads of **Goldcrests** calling. We laughed when we saw that the street up from the cottage was called Pump Lane.



Pump :D!

Further up the street in Buckton Village we found an old photo of it on the wall over the road, so we stopped for a look. It'd hardly changed since then!



Spot the difference

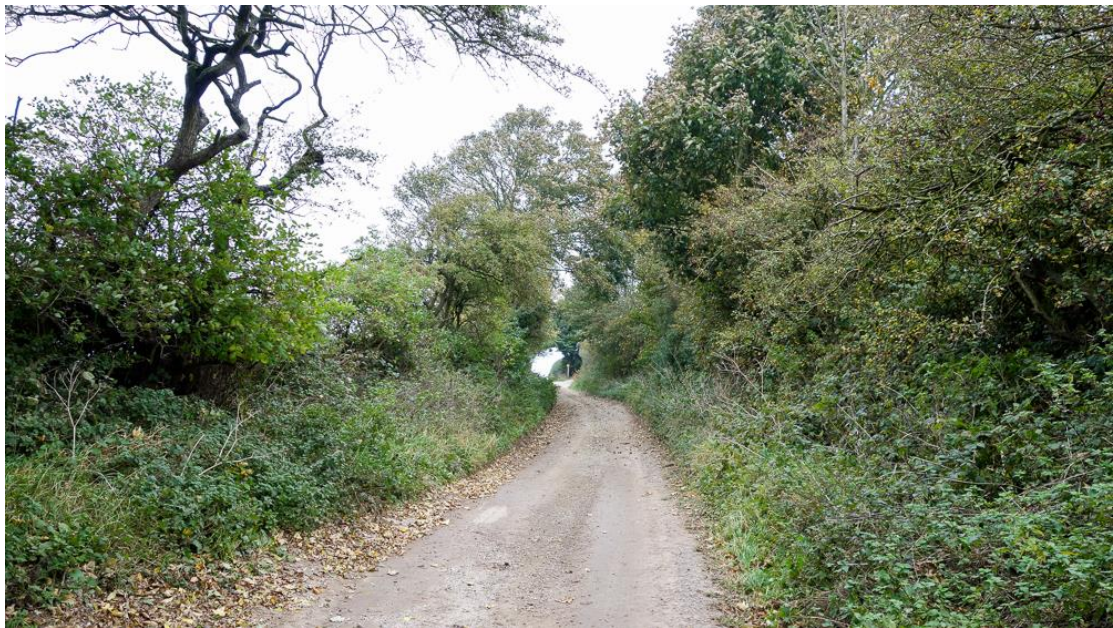
Further up the road I found the track that lead to a pond where there'd been all kinds of amazing birds, including Bluethroat in the past.





Buckton Pond

We had a look at the pond but there was nothing on it and only added **Robin** to our list, so we carried on up the track where there were birds everywhere, which I hadn't expected at all.



Track

There were so many **Blackbirds** that we didn't know where to look and couldn't help but think that there must've been a Ring Ouzel somewhere amongst them. We scanned through them as best we could and managed to pull out **Chaffinch**, **Mistle Thrush**, **Redwing**, **Blue Tit**, Goldcrest and a **Chiffchaff** but nothing out of the ordinary :(. In a brief moment of optimism we thought we heard a YBW but it turned out to be a Chiffer doing a very good impression....Boooooo! A **Pied Wagtail** flew over and we added **Great Tit** but our necks were already sore from looking up at the trees. We climbed up the bank to a viewing screen that looked down over the pond and we could see how it was a good area but typically it looked totally dead.





Misty view

There were **Mallards** on the main pond but after a more thorough scan Wendy found a single **Ruff** feeding at one of the smaller pools to the right. We also heard a **Skylark** but there was nothing else, so we carried on up the track noticing that there was finally some blue sky heading our way. A **Wren** flew across the path and some **Jackdaws** flew over just before we went through a gate. We could hear Sparrows chirping in the hedge at either side of the path ahead of us and we picked up on how feeble they sounded. A quick look at them confirmed that they were all **Tree Sparrows**, which was a real bonus. There were loads of them too, which indicated that things were obviously on the move, so we started to feel a bit more optimistic. We stopped for a look when we came to a small Copse but there was literally nothing in there and the hedge nearby did better by producing some **Goldfinches** :P. There was a break in the hedge and a fence surrounding the Copse so Wendy went off to investigate. There was an old wooden sign up which read 'Hoddy Cows Spring SSSI', which I'd seen mentioned in the Birding in Yorkshire book.



Hoddy Cows Spring SSSI

While Wendy was looking at that I found a **Yellowhammer** in a nearby tree and looking around there were loads of them as well as some **Linnets**. We then heard the high-pitched sound of Redwing and looked up to see a small flock of them heading inland having just come in off the sea. A bit of vis mig is always good to see! We carried on up the path and found a **Reed Bunting**, heard some **Greylags** and saw our 1<sup>st</sup> **Rabbit** of the week. There was a large heligoland trap set up in an area of dense bushes at the top of the field to our right.



Interesting

I'd read that the trap was operated by the local birder Mark Thomas and was keen to go over to explore, so we started to make our way through the grass towards it. Shortly after Wendy announced that the grass was way too long and soaking wet so she didn't want to go any further. Looking down at Lyca she was struggling too, so I had to agree and we turned back. The trap was surrounding the first bushes birds would reach as they came in over the cliffs. What a clever place to stick a heligoland! Getting closer to the coast we followed the path along the hedge of a stubble field and my eye was drawn to a shape silhouetted against the sky in the distance. At first I thought it was a Merlin but when we actually got our bins on it we were disappointed to see that it was just another **Kestrel**. It was nice to know that Kestrels seemed to be doing so well but a Merlin would've been a nice addition to our trip list. We finally came out onto Buckton Cliffs and were blown away as to how high they were. The drop from the white cliffs was totally sheer, so I stayed away from the edge as much as possible while Wendy got too close for my liking.....Typical!





Now that's a cliff!

There were so many **Gannets** flying around and although there wasn't nearly as many as there would've been in breeding season there were still a lot more than we'd expected at that time of the year.



Gannet

There were also **Kittiwakes** and **Cormorants** and we walked along the path until we came to a viewing platform, which looked like a much safer place to scan the cliffs from.





Much safer

The view from up there was amazing and we could just imagine how crammed with nesting sea birds the cliffs would've been in summer. There were some Gannets sitting on ledges and we could see old nests, which Wendy noticed were entwined with old plastic rope. Sadly it's a real sign of the times, which we'd never seen with our own eyes to such a degree and it really highlighted one of the many problems caused by plastic pollution to our Wildlife. Wendy scanned the cliffs to see if there were any grim remains of chicks that had become entangled in it but luckily she didn't find any....Phew!

We then spotted something, which we couldn't quite get our heads around. There was a man perched right at the edge of the cliff fishing! What the.....? He was a braver man than me that's all I can say, either that or he's totally insane! Wendy took a photo but he was too far away to really see but you can see what I mean.



Nutter!

We spotted a **Common Darter** and **Red Admiral** and then a Tree Sparrow came in off the sea. The only other birds we found were some **Feral Pigeons** so we decided to head back.

By the time we got back to the heligoland there was a bloke up there with 2 kids, who we presumed to be Mark Thomas. We wondered what he had in his nets, as going by his previous reports it could've been something amazing. Going by what we'd seen during the morning we doubted that today was his lucky day though.



What you got?

Heading back down the muddy track I noticed a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** in a field and further down there was a **Maggie**. We heard a familiar sounding feeble squeak and stopped for a look only to find 3 x male **Bullfinches** working their way up the hedge. There were a few Tree Sparrows around still but there was generally much less activity than we'd seen on our way up earlier. A **Migrant Hawker** was zooming backwards and forwards along the hedge line and when it finally landed I thought I'd try for a shot seeing as I was lacking in wildlife photos from the walk. After I'd set my camera up it was really hard to re-find but Wendy had kept an eye on it for me.





Migrant Hawker

By the time we got to the pond at the bottom of the track it was really sunny and looked much nicer than when we'd 1<sup>st</sup> seen it. We had another look from the screen but the Ruff had already gone and there were fewer birds around but we added **Grey Heron** to our list.

It was 12.35pm when we arrived back at HQ and Lyca needed a good toweling down after her muddy and wet walk. It'd been a more substantial walk than we'd expected and at 4.01 miles and 9,706 steps we felt quite tired already.



Enjoying the swinging chair

It was a great doorstep walk though and one which I planned to repeat if the wind switched to a more favourable direction. Wendy made lunch, which went down a treat and we added **Collared Dove** to our list while I tried to work out where to go for the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the day. I reckoned Bempton would be a good bet



seeing as it was nearby (we could even see the road sign from the cottage) and we'd had such a long day yesterday. After we'd chilled out for much longer than we'd planned we headed off at 2.16pm.

After a short drive down the road we arrived at Bempton Cliffs RSPB car park at 2.22pm. We got out of the car and headed towards The Dell seeing a **Rat** running across the path. Lyca couldn't have been on the ball because she didn't see it, which was lucky. The Dell looked good especially considering how close to the cliffs it was but it was totally dead.



The Dell

We went over to the Visitor Centre to get our admission into the reserve. There didn't appear to be any other way into it apart from through the building but we had Lyca with us and weren't sure what to do next. Wendy nipped in to ask and found out that dogs were allowed inside, so she came back out to tell me. As we walked through the busy shop area we overheard an old lady saying to her friend, "That's the kind of dog I want." and she pointed to Lyca. This amused us no end because she obviously had no idea how exuberant Cockerpoos can be and we reckoned that if she ended up with one like Lyca she might just live to regret it :P. Wendy flashed her RSPB card to the lady at the desk, so we got in for free whereas it would've been £4 if we weren't members. Lyca was getting a lot of attention but I was slightly on edge hoping that there were no other dogs in there or that she didn't knock something off a shelf with her wagging tail! Luckily we got through without any incidents and found the footpath, which we followed to the coastal path. Again the views of the sheer, white cliffs and blue sea were stunning and we stopped at a viewing platform to take it all in.





Steep

We didn't have it to ourselves though and there was a woman looking down at the rocks with her bins who said, "Oh there's a baby, and another one!" We looked at each other in disbelief but when we looked she was absolutely right and there were 3 Gannet chicks still sitting on their nests. We hadn't expected to see that in October. I hoped this was just due to a late brood or that they were lazy and couldn't be bothered flying yet rather than anything bad.



No hurry

We carried on along the path and noticed a **Meadow Pipit** in a field to our right before I spotted a long stretch of coastal trees. This had to be Dane's Dyke, which is a great area for migrants being the 1<sup>st</sup> line of large trees they'd hit after clearing the sea.



Dane's Dyke

It stretches all the way across the peninsula from Bempton to Flamborough and has gained itself Nature Reserve status, as it's so valuable to wildlife. I wanted to go and check it out but there was no way in from that end and we'd have to wait until we went to South Landing to view it, so I was a bit disappointed. Further along we could see a couple with a kid taking selfies on top of a bank. They were all crowded around a wooden sculpture of some description and when we got closer we could see that it was a Puffin. Wendy wanted to get a photo of it, so we hung around waiting for them to leave but they were in no hurry and were all over it like it was a celebrity or something! Eventually they walked off, so Wendy could finally get her shot.





Puffin

Closer inspection showed that it's head was obviously used as a perch and was covered in bird poo, which they'd just spent the last 10minutes rubbing their hands in.....Hahaha! We'd started to flag by then, so we decided not to go any further and turned back. Before we did we got a photo of the view southwards looking over Flamborough head.



Flamborough Head

On the way back a Butterfly whizzed past us and I got a good enough view of it to see that it was a **Painted Lady**. Wendy wasn't convinced but I was 100% certain. We then saw 3 x **House Martins**, which were flying around the cliffs and one of them looked pretty tatty. We hadn't expected to see any of them in October either but they needed to get their skates on if they were going to migrate successfully. Back at the Visitor Centre Wendy decided that she was going to buy her Christmas cards and spent ages choosing them. Lyca's tail was becoming too stressful for me, so I left Wendy to it and lead her away from anything breakable. It was 4.15pm when we got back to the car and by then we'd done 8.5miles and 19,000 steps. I was obviously more tired than I realized because, much to Wendy's amusement, I drove straight past HQ and carried on down the road. I pointed out that I was in unfamiliar territory but Wendy was having none of it :P.

Back at HQ it was 4.25pm and our feet and legs felt a bit sore from our walks. Wendy fed Lyca before we sat down to eat our tea and we were both hungry and wanted something quick. Wendy, who never eats ready meals, had bought a Quorn Tikka Masala as a standby to have before she'd cooked something but it was horrible. I couldn't get my usual Sweet and Sour Chicken and I'd had to get something different, which wasn't anywhere near as nice, so neither of us enjoyed it. Wendy went off to soak in the bath and after that she stood at the door in the hope of seeing the Barn Owl that supposedly hunts over the fields at the back of the house. One of the guests had commented in the Visitor Book that they'd seen it on a fencepost in the garden but we weren't remotely surprised that by the time it'd got too dark to see she'd seen nothing. This was going to be the calmest night of the week too and the wind was set to pick up again from then on, so it was possibly our only chance. Typical! There was literally nothing on TV, so I trawled through YouTube on my ipad and found an interesting looking documentary called 1995 Encounters – Twitchers, Isles of Scilly. It didn't disappoint and Wendy even recommended it to her Mum when she Whatsapped her after. After that I found a Birdguides 2 part interview lead by David Lyndo with Lee Evans, which was equally as entertaining. This helped to fill in the hours nicely before we headed off to bed, knackered, at 10pm.



It was 7.02am when we woke up but there was no point in leaping out of bed to get out early so we dozed until 7.44am. If the winds changed to easterly we'd need all the help we could get, so you could say we were conserving energy as opposed to being lazy :P. It was misty again but there was hardly any wind, so I decided to sit tight and wait to see if any reports came in before rushing out. Wendy gave Lyca her breakfast but she turned her nose at it and went back to sleep on the sofa. She then made herself some soup so that she had something edible sorted for her tea later and made our sarnies before she had her breakfast. Depressingly no reports came in at all, which given the misty conditions really surprised me. It'd looked like a promising start to the day but there was still nothing happening. Aargghhhh!

We managed to rustle up the enthusiasm to go out at 10.10am just in time for it to start raining. Great! It was really misty when we arrived at the North Landing car park at Flamborough at 10.20am, so the view wasn't exactly great.



Hmmmmm

We were interested to find out that these white cliffs are the most northerly chalk cliffs in Britain and are actually 50feet higher than those at Dover. Wendy gave me £1.50 for 2+ hours in the car park (good old cheapo North!) and I ran over to the machine to get my ticket. Unfortunately the machine didn't accept new £1 coins, so I went back to the car to see if she had an old one. She didn't nor did she appear to have enough change to equate to £1, so it looked like we were going to have to go somewhere to get some. Wendy went over to the huge Visitor Centre building to try the café, shop or bar but it was all locked up and in darkness. Uh oh! Back in the car we actually managed to scrape together £1 in change including 2x 5p coins, which Wendy doubted the machine would accept. As luck would have it the machine took it all and gave me a ticket, so I ran back to the car and put it in the window.....Phew!

Having wasted enough time already we got our stuff together and got out of the car. The mist was so thick that we couldn't see much of the view around us and the sound of the foghorn added an eerie tone to the atmosphere. Looking down at the bay below we could tell that on a clear day it'd look amazing but we just had to cross our fingers that the pea soup would clear so we could see it.



Nice view?

The footpath took us to some very steep steps into Holme's Gut, which is a gully caked in dense bushes and is meant to be great for migrants. Typically there wasn't any sign of life in there at all, so we tried pishing to see if we could pull something out. Very quickly I gave up but Wendy got the attention of a **Wren** and then a **Dunnock** but hilariously that was as good as it got.



Holme's Gut

We then had to climb up some equally steep steps to the other side of the headland, which felt far too much like hard work. We found **Shelduck** down on the rocks below us, a **Grey Wagtail** flew over and further along we spotted some **Oystercatchers**. It was a bit drizzly by then and everything was pretty damp including the 3 Yorkshire Terriers we could see running around on the grassy bank at the side of the path ahead of us. There was an old guy sitting on a bench with his dogs off their leads, so we just hoped that they weren't all going to run straight for Lyca and freak her out. As we got closer the dogs spotted us and the 2 of them, which seemed particularly full of beans, started running over towards us. Luckily they were just tiny puppies, which explained why they were so hyperactive but Lyca seemed to like them...Phew! They all ran round in



circles chasing each other like nutters, so the bloke came over to apologise with the older dog under his arm. The puppies were only 18 weeks old and were very cute and full of fun, which meant that they got more than their fair share of attention from us. We chatted to the bloke for ages and when we finally left he thanked us for giving him our time, which made us feel quite sad.

When we reached the 2<sup>nd</sup> café, which was closed there was a nice area of reed bed in a gully, which looked worth a check.



Reed bed

It may have looked the business but we weren't surprised to find that it was totally dead. We had a good look and apart from finally finding a **Reed Bunting** and a **House Sparrow** there was nothing else in there. We carried on and viewed the gully from the top where I caught a glimpse of a bird flying over, which had me scratching my head. It was really odd looking and I couldn't get Desert Wheatear out of my head for some reason. It obviously wasn't a Desert Wheatear but I knew it wasn't something we'd see often but typically it'd flown right off, so there was no way of knowing either. We then got talking to a birder who was from Kent and seemed to know his stuff. He asked us if we'd seen anything, which we hadn't and then told us that he'd had a female Ring Ouzel, Redpoll and Wheatear further on. There was nothing outstanding but we wouldn't have minded catching up with a Ring Ouzel again at some point, although with our luck we doubted it very much. All of a sudden he was onto something and we all looked round and briefly saw a bird disappearing into the distance. He shouted, "Did you see that?" "That looked like a Red-backed Shrike!" None of us had got more than a seconds worth of a view of its arse and he said to his wife, "It did, honest!" It didn't seem big enough to us and was more like the size of a Wheatear, so I told him about my mystery bird and threw in my suggestion. He then said that he'd had 2x Richard's Pipits in the field up ahead yesterday and then told us all about some of the crazy birds he'd found in the past. We thanked him for sharing his info and headed off to see if anything was still about and just around the corner we found the **Redpoll** in a tree. It was really close and confiding, so I raised my camera for a shot that could've been my best ever Redpoll shot but as it was so close I didn't want to move and flush it. This meant that it never came out from behind a massive branch until of course it flew off, so I'd missed another great opportunity and was pretty annoyed at myself.....Doh! You can't win!



Redpoll

Further on there was a huge caravan park where the Ring Ouzel was apparently by the fence line. Guess what? There was no Ring Ouzel in sight just tons of Blackbirds.....Boooooooooo :(. The **Wheatear** was hopping about in the field though, just as the bloke had said, so after my pitiful attempt at the Redpoll I thought I'd try and recover the situation and went off to get a shot of that instead. I desperately needed some wildlife shots from the walk but the bird wouldn't let me get close enough. I thought I'd got an OK record shot so I gave up and we carried on feeling decidedly deflated at the lack of action. Without the winds we looked set to be spending the rest of the week just exploring new territory in case we ever went back and found ourselves with better conditions. We'd lost count of the amount of years we've spent doing the same in Norfolk until we hit the right time, so I suppose this was just par for the cause. Urrghhhhh! Looking back at the gully on the opposite side I noticed a bird fly catching and raised my bins for a look. I was pleased to see a nice **Whinchat** sitting on top of the brambles, so we'd finally found an OK migrant at least!





Whinchat

We passed Six Pennies Lane where a flock of **Golden Plover** flew over but we'd already realized that our efforts were fruitless, so decided not to go any further. There was just nothing happening, so it'd be pointless and we turned round to head back. The coastal scenery was pretty amazing though.



Caves

The foghorn was still going although the mist was starting to burn away, which meant that we could finally appreciate the views up the coast. I looked out to sea and something caught my eye, which I initially thought was a Fulmar. I got my bins on them and was surprised that it was actually a **Mediterranean Gull** and the other 2 Gulls behind it were juveniles. Finally something a bit more interesting!

Back at the caravan park we had another desperate scan for the Ring Ouzel but there was still nothing apart from some Blackbirds in the bramble hedge. The

caravan park was massive and we joked that it's how Bride will look in a few years!



Caravan Park

The Whinchat was still in the reeds though, which was a nice find having not seen any in Norfolk the week before. While we were admiring the view and walking past the 2nd café we noticed a big flock of **Wigeon** out over the sea. On the other side of the cove was a field that I wanted to explore so we headed over squelching our way through the sodden grass. On the way to this field there were some small bungalows perched right on the top of the cliff. One was even being done up but I'm not sure they're going to last that long as the cliffs seem to be eroding quite badly.



Precarious!

The area was so soggy due to the run off from the field that Lyca was soaked in no time. I was hoping to find a Richard's Pipit or something but all we found was a ginormous flock of Finches. They were lined up on the wire fence but a lot of them were feeding on the ground below it, so there were even more than we could see!





Finch flock

Nearly back at the car park we could finally get a better view of the North Landing Bay now the mist had lifted.



That's better

Back at the car it was 1.15pm and Lyca had a huge drink while we hopped around because we both needed to pay the WC's a visit by then. Wendy went over 1<sup>st</sup> and came back with a look of disgust on her face and grabbed the hand sanitizer from her bag. She said they smelled like they'd been cleaned with the contents of the toilet bowls, so I couldn't wait to see what the Men's were like.....Not! They were foul and you could guarantee them to be worse than the Ladies so we both hoped we didn't have to use them again.....ever! We had our lunch and I had a look to see how long our walk had been. It was 4.95miles so we'd done 10,700steps already and I'd planned a shorter walk in the other direction after we eaten. I was fascinated by the strange building at the North landing car park. It looked like some sort of 1970s café come disco come bar. It was pretty big as well and must've been heaving in its heyday but now it looked deserted and way past its best.

It was 2.08pm when we set off, this time southwards from the car.



The bay

Walking along the path we spotted the funniest looking dog we'd ever seen running towards us. Its pointy ears, which were covered in long fur and were disproportionately huge compared to its tiny body, flapped around as it ran, so it looked comical. It was a friendly little thing though and luckily Lyca was happy to play with it while we chatted to the owners. Apparently it was a Chihawitzo, which is a cross between a Chihuahua and Lhasa Apso but it looked more like Gizmo the Mogwai from the film Gremlins than a dog.....Hahahaha! As soon as it'd gone Wendy could've kicked herself for not getting a photo of it :P. The scenery was much the same as it'd been on the other side but with the exception of a pillar of chalk cliff called The Stack in Selwick's Bay. It looked great sticking out of the sea but had somewhere along the lines been embellished by the addition of a tyre, which had been put on the top. The mind boggles as to how it'd got there but it takes all sorts!



The Stack

Lyca must've been in a good mood, as she played nicely with a Schnauzer without any incidents at all.....Phew! We were struggling to add any birds to our list but we finally gained another tick when I spotted a **Shag** out in the sea.



Wendy decided to do a repeat performance of Hampshire and let off some very loud wind, which wouldn't have been out of range of the 2 Hipsters walking behind us. This obviously created a sniggery moment for us both but there was no way I was going to let her blame it on me this time! I was aiming for North Cliff Marsh, which the new book I'd bought claimed you could access a hide overlooking the marsh via a permissive footpath. When I found it I was disappointed to see that the footpath was so overgrown there was no way we could get up to it.



It's over there somewhere

With that we turned round and started to head back, as there didn't seem like much point going any further.

Heading back we noticed how red the sky was going and then how red the sun was. We found out later that it was due to the massive storm battering the Isle of Man at the time. An odd gaggle of tiny one-storey houses made for a mad photo with the red sun.



Strange place

I've no idea why this bunch of houses were there, crushed together like that but can only think that it was originally for the fishermen that fished from the cove below?

When we got back to the car it was only 2.59pm but the car park had been great value for just £1.50. I can't remember the last time I said that after spending years of being ripped off elsewhere. We needed to go to a shop, so I found a Co-op in Flamborough Village and set my nav to take us there. Nothing is ever that simple though and we ended up finding ourselves at a dead end, which I had to back out of.....Doh! After driving round in circles we finally found it and Wendy went in to pick up a couple of bits and bobs that we needed. It was a decent sized Co-op too so that was good to know as it was only about 5-10minutes from the cottage.

It was 16c but it felt quite muggy as I drove back to HQ and I parked up outside at 3.22pm. It was really early but I'd run out of ideas by then and we were feeling pretty tired too. We'd walked 7miles and done 15,367steps, which wasn't too bad considering we were home so early. We sat down to try and relax but that was short lived when we found that the wind was really picking up at home and Hurricane Ophelia was heading straight for the IOM! We just hoped



that the forecast was wrong and that it wasn't going to happen but it was worth keeping an eye on :/. After tea we went for our baths, watched some TV and felt very tired. Lyca was especially sleepy all evening and by 9.50pm we couldn't fight it any longer and went to bed.

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October

We'd both woken up early but had heard the strong wind blowing outside and with no sign of any action from Lyca we'd gone back to sleep. Because of that it was 8.40am when we finally surfaced but we must've all needed it. It was a sunny day but it was so windy (in the wrong direction!) we just couldn't find the will to go out in it. I took Lyca out for a wee and it felt much colder than it had done, so we decided to stay in and chill out for the morning. Oh dear! After a boring morning reminiscent of Ardnamurchan we had lunch and got ourselves back into gear and went out at 1.15pm. I thought we could give the walk we'd done when we'd visited briefly last October another go, so I headed straight for the car park at Flamborough outer headland by the lighthouse.



Lighthouse

It was 1.27pm when we arrived in the busy car park and it was still sunny but very windy. We headed straight for Motorway Hedge and gave it and the field next to it a good going over even though we pretty much knew we were wasting our time.



Motorway Hedge

We walked up the hedge through a field where the farmers were cutting hay. The whole area looked like it had so much potential if the conditions were right and all the local birders can't be wrong. It was totally dead though and we only managed to find 8x Tree Sparrows, which we Manxies can't really be too complaisant about.



If only the wind would change

Back on the coastal path we could see a woman with a Border Collie running around coming towards us, so we crossed our fingers that Lyca wasn't feeling grumpy, as she hates Border Collies. When we crossed paths she stopped for a chat and Lyca stayed relatively calm.....Phew! Her dog was only 8months old and he was so lovely that we wanted to take him home with us....Hahahaha :). She was really nice too and had lots to tell us about living in the area especially during storms! She also told us to avoid a house on the approach road that had a Rotweiller because it'd bitten 3 people and the postman so he's not allowed to deliver to the house anymore....Eek! After that we walked up another field along Old Fall Hedge and up to Old Fall Plantation, which are both mega migrant hotspots.





Old Fall Plantation

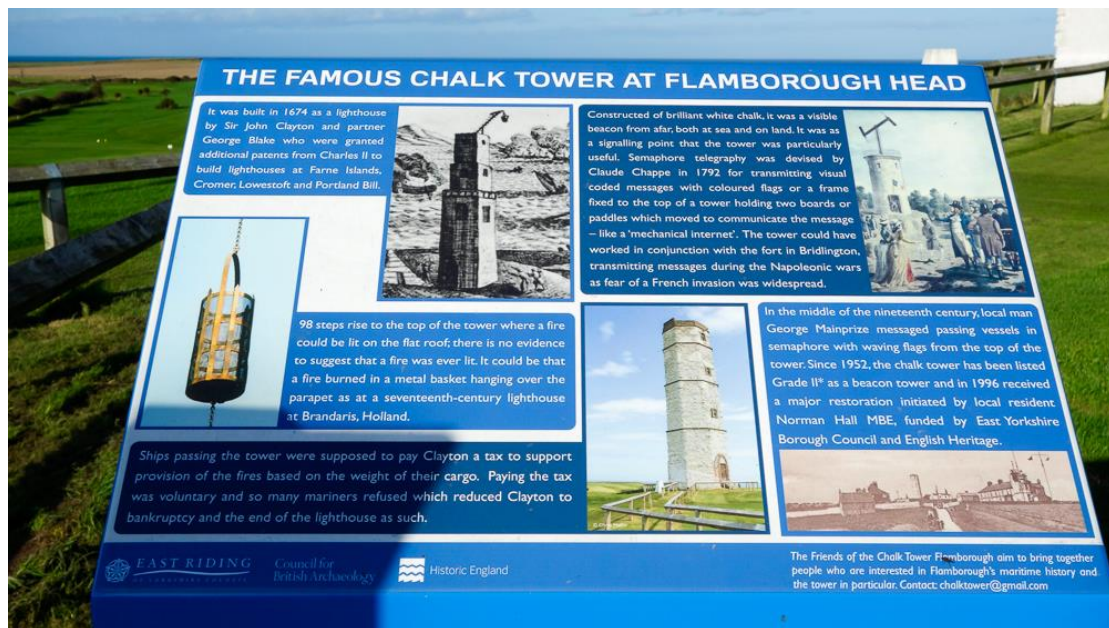
We could just imagine how good they are when the conditions were right and just wished we'd had some easterly winds. There were loads of Blackbirds feeding along the hedge-line but despite all the reports of Ring Ouzels we'd been seeing there were none there.....Boooooooo :( Looking in the plantation we could see a Badger Sett but it was very quiet on the bird front. It reminded us of the plantation at Stiffkey or Warham and in our heads we could just picture a Red-flanked Bluetail or something even better in there. In reality there wasn't even a Robin, so we carried on and found some **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** in a ploughed field. We then found ourselves up on the road where the dog we'd been warned about lived. We saw the woman we'd been talking to going to her house and then Wendy stopped for a photo of the old lighthouse.



Chalk Tower

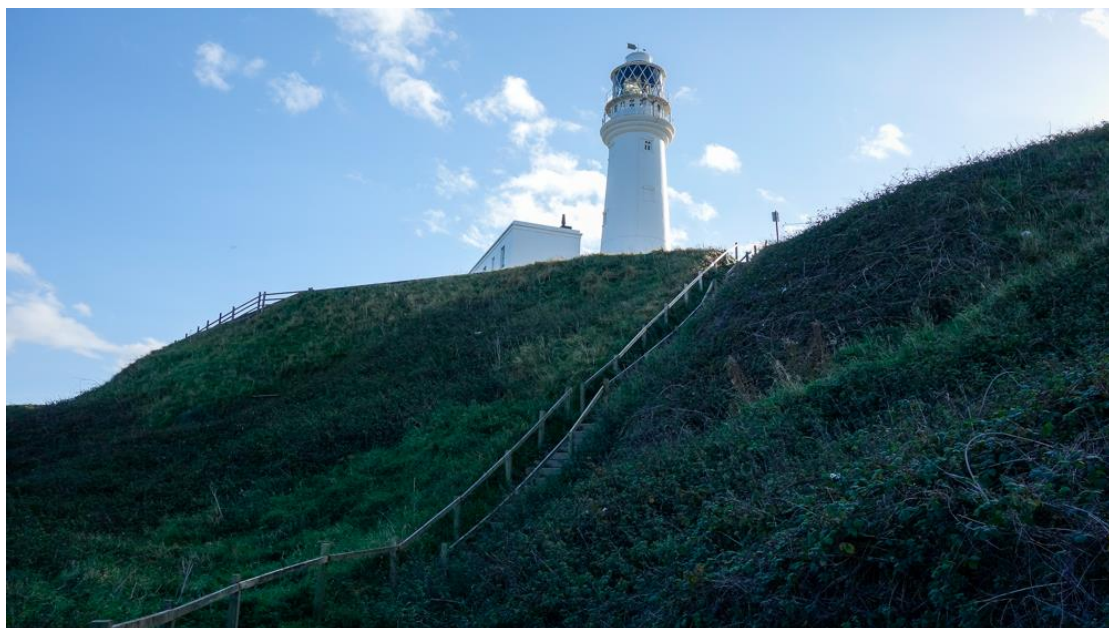


The info board said the person who built it went bankrupt as he tried to tax boats going past the headland to pay for the lighthouse but none of the boats bothered to pay.



Info

It was really sunny by then and felt quite warm despite the strong wind so when we got back to the car park at the end of the road it seemed a shame to call it a day. We wandered down towards an area known as Bay Brambles, which as the name suggests is a gully caked in dense brambles. It looked amazing for any tired migrants looking for cover after their long journey but we already knew it'd be dead. We walked down the steep steps to the bottom and looked up at the lighthouse.



Maybe we should go to Holland next time?

Of course, having walked down there, we had to walk back up again via some equally steep steps...Urrghhhh! Back at the car it was only 3.15pm and we had enough time to go somewhere else, so I drove to nearby South Landing which is on the south coast of the Flamborough headland.



When we arrived in the car park it was 3.24pm and we had no change for our ticket, so we had to go into the café to get some. Wendy got herself a cappuccino so I took advantage of the treats on offer and added some chocolate to the counter. There were a few people sitting outside and they had dogs so we took it all back to the car. I'd planned to just walk down to the beach but after picking up a leaflet in the visitor center we realized that there was a Nature Reserve there too. When we'd finished we got out and took a stroll down to that South Landing Nature Reserve, which is run by YWT.

We found the footpath, which takes you through a nice area of woodland where we heard **Long-tailed Tits** and Goldcrest calling but couldn't see them for the life of us!



Needle in a Haystack

The Tit flock was really high up but we caught a glimpse of a bird at the back of the flock that wasn't a Tit. It was so brief that we lost it and the whole flock disappeared, never to be seen again.....Grrrrr! That was probably something amazing and would've been our bird of trip! We walked around a massive house set in the grounds of the reserve and came out onto a coastal path.

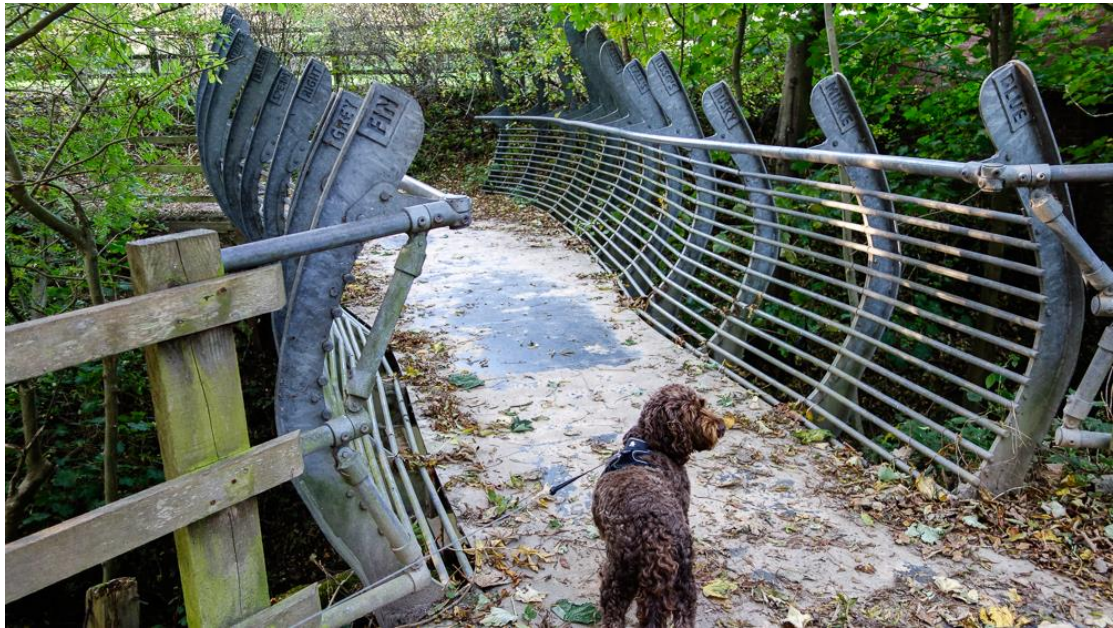




Coastal path

The view out to sea was nice and we spotted a **Rock Pipit** up there, which is an unusual bird for us to see away from the IOM.

On the way back we went across a bridge and realized it was designed like the rib cage of a Whale and each rib was labelled as a different type of Whale. Pretty smart.



Highlight of the walk

It was a lovely evening when we got back to the car at 4.18pm and we'd been so lucky to have not had any rain during our trip so far. All the footpaths had been dry and Lyca had been kept clean but the forecast was set to change and from tomorrow onwards it was saying it was going to rain :(.

Back at HQ it was 4.45pm and Lyca was starving, so she gobbled her tea in no time. I took our washing into the outhouse, which was shared with the owners in the main house. Having not been there before I ended up nearly going into the owners house by accident....Oooops! We had our tea and Lyca spent the rest of the night sleeping on the rug or the bed next door. After Wendy had been for her



soak in the bath we watched TV, which included Chris Packham – Asperger's and me. After it'd finished we did an Asperger's test for fun and although Wendy came out as a possible I got a definite :O! We'd had a weird sort of day and had only walked 6.2 miles and done 13,500 steps, which for a holiday day wasn't much. It didn't change the fact that by 10.30pm we were ready for bed and the sky was really clear when I took Lyca out, so it was pretty chilly.

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> October

When we woke up it was 7.20am and totally still outside. I checked the weather app and for the 1<sup>st</sup> time we had easterly winds :O! PANIC PANIC ALARM ALARM!! DEFCON 1 GO GO GO, so there was no sitting in the cottage chilling out for us this morning! While we had breakfast and Wendy sorted our lunch we were hoping that loads of reports were going to come flooding in but there wasn't a single one. Errr what the.....? Lyca refused to eat her breakfast, so we had to bring it out with us again in the hope she'd eat it later. I reckoned that with the conditions being on our side for once we needed a return trip to North Landing to see what we had been blown in.

It was a much clearer scene when I parked up at 9.38pm and Lyca was being very vocal in the back of the car and was obviously raring to go. We didn't hang about and set off down and up through Holme's Gut, which annoyingly was again dead.



Holme's Gut

Walking along the coastal path it was still dead and we started to wonder what on earth was going on :-\ . When we got all the way back to the huge caravan park we found a Wheatear hopping about in the field again but still no sign of any Ring Ouzel :( . Unbelievable!



Wheatear



Caravans

When we got to Six Pennies Lane we turned round again, as the walk had yet again been fruitless and we trudged our way back.





More Caravans

As we approached some reeds I saw a small Warbler type bird fly in from the coast.



Bay

It had an undulating flight pattern as it flew over the field but it dived straight into the reeds and vanished before we could even get it in our bins. We hung around waiting to see if it'd come out and even stuck around in the hope that some incoming dog walkers would flush it out but they didn't. We eventually gave up on it as a lost cause and carried on. We heard a **Greenfinch** flying over when we got to the field where all the finches had been lined up on the fence the first time around but even they were few and far between. Feeling very deflated and like giving up completely we were back at the car at 11.47am. I couldn't believe how dead it had been and scratched my head as to why there was even less bird activity despite having an easterly wind than in strong westerlies....?

We'd walked 4.4miles and done 9,598steps for a Greenfinch and Wheatear but at least we were giving Lyca a better day than yesterday. Looking longingly back at Holme's Gut I spotted a large looking bird sitting on top of a bush, so I told Wendy. Her reaction was the same as mine, that it looked like a Red-backed Shrike, so we both grabbed our bins for a better look. A Red-backed Shrike wouldn't be much to ask for in such a great place, so it wasn't out of the question. We both raised our bins and got the bird into focus only to find a \*\*\*\*\* Linnet sitting there! We started to question our own sanity after that but after a week

and a half of hammering brilliant areas for little or no reward desperation was obviously starting to take hold. What were we going to do for the remainder of the holiday? We didn't want to waste it but it was blindingly obvious that nothing was going to happen between then and when we left.

We ate our lunch and watched a **Common Gull** flying past over the sea...Whoopy doo :( I sent a depressed Tweet out to Flamborough Bird Observatory for their migration week to which they replied, "Calm before the storm." Yeah, when we were back at home maybe! We added another bird to our list when I spotted a **Red-throated Diver** out in the bay but Wendy had given up looking by then and was trying to get Lyca to eat her breakfast. She ate a few bits of carrot and then stopped but she was pulling on her harness to get into the front seat. Normally we wouldn't entertain such bad and diva type behaviour but this time we caved in. After I'd unclipped her she jumped into the front, sat on Wendy's knee and scooped the rest of her breakfast without even coming up for air! She was put straight back into the back after that just so she didn't think she'd got the better of us completely. Dogs! A **Kittiwake** flew past just before I pulled out of the car park at 12.45pm, which was another new bird for the trip although we'd have much preferred a RBS, GGS, RO or anything vaguely interesting for that matter! I decided I didn't need to set my sat nav to get me back to Flamborough Head but this turned out to be a bad move. Having thought I'd find it no problem I promptly went the wrong way much to Wendy's amusement.....Doh!

I parked up in the car park by the lighthouse again at 12.52pm and even though we were spending the day covering old ground it was worth a 2<sup>nd</sup> shot.



Flamborough Lighthouse

We scoured Motorway Hedge, all the way up the hay field and back to the coastal path where we'd stopped to chat with the nice lady and her dog.





Coastal view

It was totally dead apart from a **Curlew** down on the rocks below us.....Urrghhh! Desperation must've started to take hold again when I thought I had a Little Gull but it wasn't. There was a bloke out fishing in a kayak and while we watched him Wendy spotted what she thought was a Dolphin miles out to sea. She tried to get me onto it for ages but it just wasn't coming back up again but eventually I saw it too and there were 3 of them. I raised my camera to try to get a record shot in order to ID one but they was so far out I couldn't get them in my viewfinder when they came up.....Grrrr! They were so distant that we couldn't even tell whether they were Dolphins or Porpoises but we mentioned them to a local birder who stopped to ask us if we'd seen anything. When we told him he said they were more than likely to be **Porpoises**, which was better than nothing or a kick in the teeth at least. Not surprisingly he hadn't seen anything while he'd been out, so we thanked him anyway and carried on regardless.

When we got to Old Fall Plantation things finally started to look up when we heard Redwing flying over. They were dropping down into the plantation too, so we wondered what else had dropped in during the day. There were loads of birds in there compared to the previous time but all we could see were Chaffinches and Tits. We kept looking and found a single Yellowhammer and then we spotted some birders walking around in the middle of plantation and wondered how they'd got in. There was a fence all the way around it and we'd presumed that was because they didn't want people in there but we must've got it wrong. Next we heard a call, that we recognized as being **Fieldfare** and we scanned the tops of the trees where it was coming from. Fieldfare are large thrushes, so it was hard to believe that we couldn't find them but luckily we finally saw them when the 3 birds flew out. We could also hear Goldcrests and were keen to check them in case there was a Firecrest or YBW amongst them. As usual this was just wishful thinking so we carried on round the side where there was even more action going on. The place was full of birds and it was hard to keep up but Wendy was fixed on a bird right at the back, obscured by branches and leaves, which looked like a Chaffinch but had briefly shown to be paler underneath. She just couldn't see it well enough and sighed as she walked away saying, "I hope that wasn't a Brambling!" I couldn't see it and it wasn't budging for all the tea in China, so I just dismissed it as a lost cause. A very noisy

Helicopter broke the silence as it flew over towards the coastguard building while we walked round to view the other side of the plantation. On that side we could see a nice little pond in these trees as well and I wondered what amazing birds that has had in the past!



Pond

I looked into the trees and spotted a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** working its way up the side of a tree. I got Wendy onto it and then tried to get a shot seeing as I was still lacking in Wildlife photos.



Great-spotted Woodpecker



By then it was really high up so it seemed pointless but all of a sudden we heard a call and looked at each other and said, "**Brambling!**" Wendy had been right all along but it's a good job it'd called because there was no way we were getting a clear view of it! The Coastguard Helicopter looked as though it was picking someone up from North Landing but we'll never know. As we edged our way down the fence we found an entrance into the trees, which must've been how the other birders had got in. There was a wooden sign up saying 'New Fall Plantation' which was news to me as everything I'd ever read about the place had called it Old Fall Plantation.



Old or New?

This confused me for a while but I was snapped out of it when I finally got a report through on my phone, so I had a look. There was a Radde's Warbler on the Nature Trail at Bempton, which by complete fluke was where I'd planned to go next. Before we left we saw lots of odd little larvae on the top of the fence posts.



Harlequin ladybird larvae



We worked out these were Harlequin Ladybirds and that was bad news as these alien species are making tons of other species endangered! I considered squishing them all as they aren't good news but we'd have been there all day and I couldn't bring myself to do it.

Not wanting to waste any more time we quickly started to head back up to the field by the road but we were suddenly stopped in our tracks. We could see a woman at the top of the field with a Rottweiler and we remembered what the nice lady with the Border Collie had said. Uh oh! That had to be the dog that had bitten all those people, so not wanting to be next I thought on my feet and ushered Wendy and Lyca into an adjoining field with a 'Private' sign on the gate. We hid round the corner and waited for her to go past for what seemed like ages but there was still no sign of them. I slowly poked my head out, so as not to draw attention myself and looked up the field only to see that the field was empty. Eh? That was a bit weird but the coast appeared to be clear, so we all came out and carried on. Wendy could smell the strong aroma of apples and looking at the ground she noticed it was covered in crab apples. She just wished she had a big bag and the time to grab some to take home for her Mum to make some crab apple jelly with. We rushed up the field and looking behind us we noticed one of the birders who'd been in the plantation earlier hemping it up behind us, so he must've got the report too. We raced all the way down the road back to the car park seeing a mixed flock of House and Tree Sparrows in a bush. By the time we got back at 3.07pm there'd been no more reports of the Radde's and we started to wonder if there were some stringers around. Not only were there oodles of Ring Ouzels being reported and we hadn't seen anything but Blackbirds but now there was this! We didn't know whether to believe it or not but it'd been in my plans anyway, so was worth a check. We stopped at the Co-op while we were passing and then parked up at Bempton RSPB car park at 3.35pm.

There were a few birders standing about chatting while we got out of the car but they quickly cleared off so we went for a look at The Dell up the road just before the car park.



The Dell

There was a sign next to a hole in the ground pointing out that it was a Badger sett!





Very thoughtful

The Dell looked amazing and there was some Sea Buckthorn opposite it, which featured on the front cover of book I had with a Ring Ouzel in it. Huh, chance would be a fine thing! With nothing apparently about we set off up the road and Wendy asked another bloke who was coming down towards us if he knew anything. He said that the Radde's had been seen 15minutes ago but had flown into a field with no access.....Typical! He gave us directions and we trotted off up the road where we rounded a corner and found ten or so birders standing looking bored in a field including the birder from New/Old Fall Plantation. We went in to join them but nobody was looking at anything in particular and they all looked depressed. This looked like yet another wild goose chase and Wendy made it quite clear that she didn't want to be there for hours.



Radde's field

After staring at a hedge for ages all of a sudden the **Radde's Warbler** surprised everyone when it flew out of a bush and hurtled across the field at full speed and disappeared into the trees. All the birders stampeded over to where it'd gone and then everything went quiet again. Was that it? After waiting around for all



that time that was the best view we were going to get of it? I was determined to stick it out for a while longer in case it showed properly, which were the exact words the now very cold and shivering Wendy didn't want to hear. While we stood around a very posh and nosey family had spotted the birder crowd and had come to see what was going on. They hung around by the gate looking at us all while their young son threatened to come running into the field. We could kiss goodbye to the Radde's if that happened but they started to call him back and we weren't surprised to find that he was called, "Jonty!" What is it with families with kids called Jonty? :P. Under our breath while we were sniggering we were saying, "\*\*\* off Jonty" over and over willing him to go away and luckily he eventually got bored and they all cleared off. The next cause for irritation was when the bloke who seemed to be 'Top Dog' in the birder crowd started playing a call recording of a Radde's, so again I mumbled under my breath for him to turn it off and calm down. There was literally nothing happening by then and the others had gathered together in their cliquey little group and were saying that they were going to lock up the gate to the field in 5 minutes. It turned out that the RSPB staff had opened the field up especially, so we'd been lucky to be allowed access to the otherwise private field even if it was just to see a quick flash of the bird. Wendy was more than a bit fed up by then so at 4.05pm I agreed to call it a day and we trudged off back to the car.

I wanted to check The Dell again, so Wendy took Lyca back to the car while I went off for a wander. There were a few birders about looking and they were very quick to tell me that there was a **Tawny Owl** asleep in the hawthorn just in front of me! Apparently it'd been there all day, so how we'd missed it 1<sup>st</sup> time around was anyone's guess! To be fair it was really well camouflaged, so I let myself off lightly.



Spot the Tawny Owl





Tawny Owl

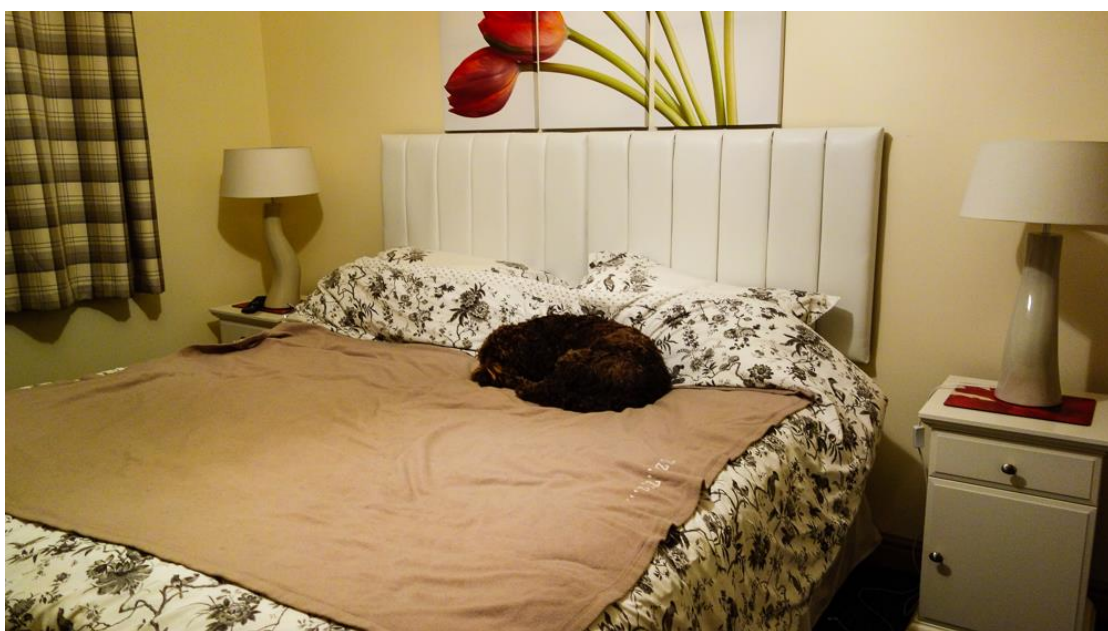
I went straight to the car to get Wendy but after a few minutes her hands were so cold they were going numb, so she hot-footed it back to Lyca in the car to warm up again. The birders then told me about a Barn Owl and YBW that were up at the top of the road, so I legged up to see if they were still around. Wendy was going to be well hacked off if she missed out on these two birds! When I got to the bushes at the top I waited for quite a while until I saw a movement and raised my bins to see a **Yellow-browed Warbler** skulking around.....decent :). A few other birders appeared so I told them where it was then turned round to try see the Barn Owl. After a few minutes the photographers nearby starting shooting and sure enough the **Barn Owl** floated over the far hedge and started hunting over the field too. I raced back down to the car to tell Wendy and as it was so cold I drove up the road and parked at the side. We got out and stood at the roadside, staring at the YBW bushes but there was no sign of any movement. It was already getting quite dark, so I had a horrible feeling it'd already hunkered down to roost. Wendy was shivering but after a few hopeless minutes it called and Wendy finally saw it.....Phew! I tried to get a shot but it was too dark for anything decent but unfortunately for Wendy the Barn Owl had already moved off and was nowhere to be seen.



Yellow-browed Warbler

She was gutted as well as freezing but, as they say, “Two out of three ain’t bad.”

It was 5.02pm when we got back to HQ and as usual Lyca was starving and wolfed down her dinner. Wendy had bought me a pizza from the Co-op earlier, which I was looking forward to, so she shoved it in the oven to cook. Wendy, who couldn’t face another bowl of ‘same old soup’, succumbed to the smell of it and I ended up having to give some of it away..... :(. We’d managed to walk 8.63miles and had done 18,800steps, which we reckoned was good enough. Lyca hardly moved all evening, not even when Wendy cooked the rest of the broccoli to put in her dinner!



Zzzzzz

Wendy went for a bath and then phoned her Mum, which was very frustrating because whatsapp kept flaking out. I had a look at the weather forecast for our



sailing home and was worried to see an incoming storm so it looked horrendously bad for Saturday and Sunday. We weren't going to worry too much about that yet though and decided to wait and see how things panned out before freaking out. We'd had enough by 10pm and went off to bed very tired.

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October

It was 7.10am when we woke up and looking outside everywhere was shrouded in thick mist again. Wendy told me that she'd woken up during the night to a weird whirring sound and the cooker beeping, so I went for a look. The clock on the cooker was flashing, so there must've been a power cut. It was a very grey scene from the garden when I took Lyca out which considering I had big plans for the day wasn't ideal. Since we'd had a second night of easterlies I'd planned to go back to Spurn, which would involve the biggest drive of the week. I'd always wanted to go back there to explore it properly after our flying visit last October and another quick visit this time but it might be a waste of time if we couldn't see further than the end of our noses! It started to rain while we had breakfast and Wendy made the sarnies but for the first time I started to get some reports through. There was an Olive-backed Pipit and a Shorelark, which had flown into an area we couldn't get to due to having Lyca with us, at Spurn.....Urrghhhh! There was also Ring Ouzel and 2x Yellow-browed Warblers at Bempton, so hopefully this was just the start of a good birding day. By 9.20am we set off hoping that it wouldn't take us too long to get there.

Inevitably we got stuck behind a very slow learner driver, then a lorry and then a tractor and with the roads being so narrow I couldn't overtake, so we just had to sit it out. All of a sudden the heavens opened and it started thrashing it down just as we arrived at the car park at Spurn at 10.47am. It was so bad there was no point in getting out of the car but this hadn't stopped a couple of hardcore locals that were using the opened boot of a car as a shelter while they chatted. Wendy ran over to the WC's and then I had a brainwave. I checked in the book and nearby Kilnsea Wetlands NR allowed dogs and had a hide so we could shelter and look for birds until hopefully the rain passed.....Sorted! It was 10.55am when I parked up and it was still raining so I checked the weather map. Unbelievably there was a tiny band of rain that was set to move in the opposite direction to the wind and stay firmly fixed over Spurn and Flamborough for the day.....Typical! Having made the effort to get there we had no choice but to just get out and brave the elements, so we headed out into the rain. There was a little Wren on the gatepost so I grabbed a shot of him.



Wren

We stopped at the gate and Wendy spotted a nice **Little Stint** feeding on the near side of the pool with some **Dunlin**.



Kilnsea Wetland NR

We scuttled our way along the wet path until we found the hide and dived in for some cover. We brought Lyca in with us regardless of the fact that there were 3 birders in there already but they didn't seem to mind. We sat down and one of said that there was a Jack Snipe and gave us directions to where it was. We thanked him, told them about the Little Stint and had a scan of the muddy edge just to the right of the main pool until we found the **Jack Snipe** bobbing away amongst a couple of **Common Snipe**. It was interesting to see them both together and how the Jack Snipe was much smaller in comparison than we'd realised. Wendy then spotted 2x male **Pintails** out on the far side of the pool and we also added **Wigeon**, **Teal** and a **Little Egret** to our list. When it finally



stopped raining we thought we'd better make the most of the dry spell and go back to our original plan, so we got up and raced back to the car with others behind us seemingly doing the same. The Little Stint had gone but there were 8x Reed Buntings instead, which would be a sight to behold back at home!

I parked up for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in the Spurn Point car park by the Bluebell café at 11.32am. The thick mist was still stubbornly hanging around so the view wasn't what we'd envisaged. Hopefully it would've grounded some decent birds though although we did wonder if we'd be able to see anything! We wandered up the road to the famous 'triangle' but through the pea soup it appeared to be dead, so we carried on.

Walking up the road there were loads of Blackbirds and Redwing dropping down from the sky and taking cover in the trees and bushes, which we could barely see. Further along we could just about see the building site where the infamous new YWT Visitor Centre was still under construction.



New Visitor Center

When we'd been there last October we'd seen all the protest signs dotted around and could fully understand why the locals were so against it. It was set in an amazing area of scrub and bushes, which had historically been a hotspot for migrants! It was a shame to see the area flattened when there's so many other places that it could've been built on that wouldn't have reduced vital feeding areas and safety for tired migrants. With so much human disturbance it's unlikely to ever be able to coax anything in again! We scanned around as best we could but saw nothing so we carried on up the road until I realized we'd missed the turn off to the canal bank section we'd been aiming for....Doh! It's hard enough when you're in unfamiliar territory but the addition of the mist just made it virtually impossible. We backtracked until we found the footpath and wandered along the bank through the swirling mist wondering what it looked like.



Cracking view!

If we could've seen what was around us or in front of us we'd have been much happier but at least the rain was still holding off. A bloke with a Cocker Spaniel appeared and luckily Lyca was well behaved. She seemed to like northern dogs :P. I found a Brambling in the trees next to us and we heard a **Water Rail** squealing from the reeds below. I then got a report of our new nemesis, a Little Bunting that'd been seen at Spurn Point.....Nooooooooo! This was bad in so many ways. Not only could we not go there with Lyca but even if we could the chances of seeing it through the mist were slim if not zilch and we'd have to be practically on top of the bird to see it! We'd also grown suspicious of recent reports and given the terrible conditions we wondered if it was just a Reed Bunting. We decided to go with the latter but shortly after I got a report of another on canal bank, which was where we were.....O! Apparently the bird had flown into the garden of Rose Cottage, wherever that was, so we decided to just carry on until we found some birders or a cottage. The bloke with the Cocker Spaniel appeared again, so Wendy asked him if he knew where it was and he told us it was just a bit further up and that we'd see the crowd. With slightly more optimism we rushed off crossing our fingers that we'd finally be able to tick Little Bunting off and get ourselves another lifer.

It wasn't long before we found a fairly sizeable group of birders standing on the path ahead of us, so we joined them. Nobody was looking at anything and we soon got the gist that the bird had supposedly flown into a hedgerow miles away, so our hearts sank. In that mist there was no way anyone was seeing it again! Looking around we spotted the bloke we'd met at North Landing who we were now pretty sure was a stringer. We really hoped that it wasn't his bird we were making an effort to attempt to see! There was nobody out looking for the OBP from earlier either and no further reports of it, so we started to doubt that too and gave it up as a bad job.





Coastal path

We ended up walking back past the Crown and Anchor Pub where the Arctic Warbler had been, so we stopped for a quick look even though it hadn't been reported since the day we'd arrived! The road back to the car park was lined with trees and we found an old Churchyard, which looked great. There was tape everywhere so you couldn't wander around the graves, which presumably was a birder deterrent.



Old Church

We noticed that there were a few places that were private and locked up with 'Friends of Spurn' signs on them. We wondered who they were and it reminded us of Holme in Norfolk where you have one side of the reserve which is NWT and the other NOA, which we can't go in, as we're not members. We checked a small field near the end too but there was nothing about and we found ourselves back at the car at 1pm.

Having eaten nothing but the same old sarnies for the best part of 2 weeks we'd already decided that we were going to see what we could get from the Bluebell Café for lunch. It was such a gloomy day that we were hoping they had some nice

greasy hot pasties to warm us up and refuel us for the rest of the day (and probably the next week :P). It'd started to rain again, so we'd timed our walk well as had some other birders who were also returning to their cars. We spoke to a woman who was with a bloke and a very high-pitched yelping dog who said there'd been some Twite hanging around by the car park, so we'd failed to see them as well as the Olive-backed Pipit, Little Bunting and Shorelark....Grrrrrr! Wendy trotted off to see what goodies she could find, while I sat in the car waiting for about 25minutes until she finally came back looking anything but happy. They didn't have any cheese pasties for her and the meat ones had vegetables in them so I wouldn't have liked them either. She'd had to get me a sausage roll, which had been microwaved and a toasted teacake for herself, which was by then stone cold. The woman serving had made the food before she'd even started the cappuccino, which is one of Wendy's real bug bears. She said she'd been dying to say, "Why don't you make the cappuccino while you stand around waiting for the tea cake, so it doesn't go cold before I've even left the building?" and had been hopping around biting her tongue. The woman was on her own and a volunteer, so she didn't want to be too harsh but even so it's not rocket science! On the other hand though, my sausage roll (which had been heated up before anything else and had been sat in a bag on the counter for ages) was still so hot I couldn't eat it and considering I was so hungry it was very slow going. None of it was very nice either and after wasting nearly a tenner Wendy wished she hadn't bothered.....Urrghhhh!

We'd only walked 1.8miles and done 4,100steps by then so we had a lot of catching up to do but this wasn't a very nice prospect in the rain. We sat watching the view through the windscreen become less visible by the second and depression started to set in. Everybody we'd spoken had told us about how many female Ring Ouzels they'd found in amongst the copious amounts of Blackbirds that were around. We hadn't found a single one and the best we'd come up with was some with a very slight suggestion of a bib but they were still just Blackbirds. What were we doing wrong? Maybe we should just give up.....or maybe it was them that should give up and stop stringing Blackbirds into Ring Ouzels!!!!!!! Hahaha. Whoever was right or wrong we were going to pay even more attention to female Blackbirds from that point on, just in case we were missing something :/.

By the time we'd finished our lunch the rain had stopped so we headed out again at 1.42pm. I decided not to bother taking my camera seeing as there was nothing about to photograph. We went in the opposite direction this time and walked northwards up the track through the mist seeing loads of BLACKBIRDS on the path next to the road. We found ourselves on a footpath, which ran between some farm fields and a caravan park and again there were BLACKBIRDS everywhere. There were also Redwing all over the ploughed fields and hedgerows, so we had our work cut out checking through them all still paranoid that we might just be missing something.





Redwing

By the time we got to the top of the path we still hadn't managed to string a RO but I worked out that if we carried on we'd get back to Kilnsea Wetlands on the far side.



Misty

Deciding that this was a good plan we carried on until we saw a weird concrete dish standing in a field.



Eh?

We stopped for a look and read the info board next to it, which told us that it was a sound mirror from WW1 used as an early warning device for incoming Zeppelins. Cool! I heard months later on a Radio 4 program that there's only two left in the whole of England!



Oooooo

When we got back to the pool we had a scan but only managed to add **Little Grebe** to our list as it was so misty, so we turned back.





Could be anything out there

We bumped into the bloke with the Spaniel again on the way back to the car park and he told us that there was a Black Redstart over on the campsite fence. OMG! Considering it was the only decent birding day so far we were doing exceptionally well at avoiding just about every bird on the entire east coast! Not wanting to miss out again we zipped through a gap in the hedge, which brought us out onto a coastal path. There was a huge caravan park up ahead with what must've been the world's grimmest kids playground in the grounds.



What fun!

We presumed it must look a bit more inviting on a fine day but today it just looked like something out of a depressing and grey Smiths video. With the severe coastal erosion being more than evident everywhere we looked, we started to wonder what it'd looked like in its heyday. The concrete foundations of where there used to be caravans were still there but they were now dangerously close to the edge.



Tick tock

Further along there were the remains of some huge concrete structures that lay in a collapsed state on the beach! Grim!



Kerplunk!

Grim as it was, it was exactly the kind of place where we'd expect to see a Black Redstart but although we gave the entire stretch a thorough going over there was no sign of one. There was however a constant stream of Redwing flying in off the sea and in one group we noticed some smaller finch sized birds. They landed up ahead of us, so we raised our bins for a look only to see that they were Brambling! They'd dropped down on the 1<sup>st</sup> bit of land they'd come to and as luck would have it there were bird feeders up, so they were able to feed up on the spilt seed. Brilliant! They must've been so tired that we got so close that we could practically stand on them and Wendy was able to get a point and click shot just to make a point.





Brambling (point and click)

It was only then that I started to regret not bringing my camera but that was just typical of my luck! We could hear more flying in too but we still didn't find the Black Redstart or Twite despite our best efforts. It was a very interesting area and we could tell how good it could be though, so we didn't regret our diversion.

Back at the car it was 3.15pm and Wendy and Lyca got in but I thought I'd go back with my camera and try to get some shots of the Brambling as it was only a few hundred yards away. Wendy was cold and wanted to get going, so she rolled her eyes in head and groaned. The mist had lifted by then but the forecast was predicting thunder and lightning at Bempton from about 4pm, so she really didn't want to be out in it. When I'd gone she unwrapped Lycas uneaten breakfast and put it down in front of her and she finally ate it.....Phew! Having only had a toasted teacake for her lunch Wendy ate her sarnie while she waited for me and got very bored.

I set off and near the collapsed concrete structures I started scouring big time, as surely that's where the Black Redstart would be. As I rounded a corner I spotted a Great black-back harassing a small bird only a few feet above the sea and suddenly thought it might've been going after a Little Auk :O! I got it in my bins and was totally gutted to see that it was actually a knackered Blackbird :( The massive GBB managed to twist and turn and knock it into the sea where it grabbed it in its bill and flew off, all the time having to fight off another GBB. It was so sad to think that the Blackbird had got all the way across the North Sea only to get clobbered 50 yards from safety.



Great-blackbacked Gulls taking a migrating Blackbird ☹

I trudged on, hoping I wouldn't see anything else upsetting when suddenly the Black Redstart appeared on the caravan park fence! Finally something half decent. It hopped off and disappeared but a few minutes later appeared on the muddy section in front of me.



Black Redstart

Another group of birders appeared and looking down at me said, "Had anything?" I told them about the GBB incident and they just sneered so I then said, "Oh yeah and just a Black Redstart." The birders nearly poo'ed their pants and said they'd been looking for hours.....Ha! I just waved my arm and said, "Yeah it was over there somewhere" and walked off to look for the tired Bramblings. Annoyingly they'd already gone so I turned round but I heard a few



more Brambling flying over and luckily they came down into some weeds just ahead of me. I managed to sneak up on them and got a few shots.



Brambling

Happy with that (bar the GBB incident) I wandered back to the car but by then the weird clay type mud had made my shoes about 4 times bigger and equally heavier and it seemed impossible to get off!

While I was heading back Wendy saw a flock of 4 Finches fly in and land on the beach and hoping that they might be the Twite she got out of the car and went over to have a look. They were just more Brambling but it was a good job she'd got out as a **Merlin** zoomed up the beach. Luckily even though we were both in different places we both saw it and I met up with Wendy before she'd got back in the car. When I got back it was 3.46pm and I told Wendy all about the Blackbird being eaten by the GBB, which she was very glad she hadn't seen!

At 3.52pm I drove back to Kilnsea Wetlands to see if the Jack Snipe was still around because I thought I could run round and get a photo. Wendy stayed in the car while I ran back to the hide but annoyingly there was no sign of it. There were loads of waders flying in though because it was high tide, which was interesting to see. We left at 4.07pm and passed some **Whooper Swans** grazing in a field on the way to our last stop of the day.

I parked up at the famous Sammy's Point at 4.14pm and I really wanted to see it for my own eyes, as I'd often seen reports from there. There was Redwing and Fieldfare in all the hedges and we got out of the car and climbed up the bank to view the Humber estuary.



Sammy's Point

There were hundreds of waders out there and we could see more **Knot** than we could feasibly count and 7x **Grey Plover** amongst them. It looked like the kind of place where anything could turn up and you might want to spend a few hours there but it was too cold and late by then for us to want to stick around. We had to drive back to HQ yet, which was going to take a while and Wendy crossed her fingers that we wouldn't hit the thunderstorm.

As we drove past Easington we thought it'd be worth a last ditch attempt at the Rose-coloured Starling that was being seen regularly. We found the exact address it was being reported from but there wasn't any Starlings around never mind a Rosy one....Grrrrr! We'd done 14,700 steps by then though and had been extremely lucky to have dodged the rain all day. We'd also dodged most of the birds too, so it was a toss up as which one we'd have preferred. It wasn't even 5pm yet but it was practically dark as I drove home and the heavens opened when we got to Bridlington. We hoped it wasn't the start of the thunderstorm and luckily we didn't hear the faintest rumble of thunder all the way back to HQ.

It was 6.05pm when we got back and our boots were totally caked in heavy clay type mud and had to be taken off outside. Wendy gave Lyca her tea and then set about making mine but she wasn't hungry having eaten her sarnie at Spurn, so she went off to warm up in the bath. I had another look at the weather forecast and saw that it was predicting gale force 7-8 for our crossing so although it'd be rough it looked as though it'd still be scheduled to go as we have been in worse than that. There was no information on the Steam Packet website about our sailing yet, so we were still keeping our eye on it. Lyca was a very tired dog again and kept us amused by barking and twitching in her sleep, so she must've been having some very eventful dreams. Wanting to make the most of our last full day tomorrow we went off to bed at 10pm.

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October

When we woke up it was 8.10am and we were starting to get more than a bit edgy about getting home. The 1<sup>st</sup> thing I did was get up and check the Steam Packet website and weirdly there were no updates about our sailing on Sunday morning. If it was cancelled then we discussed the option of going on the



Saturday afternoon sailing instead. This wasn't ideal, as not only would we lose our dog cabin but also the Travelodge room for Saturday evening. The only choice would be to sit outside on the deck with Lyca too if the dog lounge was full but if we didn't strike while the iron was hot then the next sailing wouldn't be until Tuesday at 2.15am and we'd both be in trouble at work :O! The weather this morning was perfect and the sailing at 12.30pm was going but there was no way we'd make it to Heysham in time even if we'd left right that second.....Aarrghhh! Wendy felt sick and we both felt pretty hacked off, so we weren't ready to go out until 10.45am. I thought we could give our local walk a second go seeing as there'd been some movement yesterday and it'd be nice to use it as a comparison.

With all the rain we'd had the day before the track was really muddy and full of puddles, so it was hard going. The pond was looking very nice with the clear sky though.



Buckton Pond

Wendy had started to get some really sharp pains in her left knee, which were quite sore but didn't seem too bad, so she tried to ignore it. A pigeon flew over so I had a look and saw that it was a **Stock Dove**, which was very nice having not seen any at home for years. We could hear Brambling calling and there were Blackbirds and Redwing everywhere again. When we got as far as the copse we could hear loads of Brambling calling very loudly and stopped to see where they were. All of a sudden it occurred to me that it was actually a recording and looking at the trees Wendy spotted a mist net. Ha!



Trapping

There were 3 nets in total and the recording seemed to be working as all the birds were flying straight for them. There were 2 blokes ringing in there, which we presumed to be Mark Thomas and a friend. All of sudden a Blackbird got caught in one of the nets and it made a right racket as it struggled to free itself, so we felt quite sorry for it. The blokes were very quick to go in and get it out though and it was definitely a Blackbird and not a Ring Ouzel. We bet the 2 ringers were thinking exactly the same :P! Another Stock Dove flew over but apart from that it was pretty dead despite our optimism that it'd be better than the first time. We turned back and squelched our way down the track with Wendy now limping badly due to her knee having kicked off big time. We heard a **Redpoll** flying over on the way and were back at HQ at 12.10pm.

As I walked past the car I noticed that somehow all the windows were down, which was very worrying. I hadn't even been near it yet and I wondered if they'd been down all night! I put them up and checked inside but it didn't seem to be wet luckily. When we got in I had another look at the wind forecast and it was looking even worse for our sailing and reality finally sunk in. We had to start taking it seriously but there was nothing we could do right there and then, so it'd have to wait till later. We were all caked in mud when we got back and our boots were filthy, as were Lycas paws. We'd been lucky for the past 2 weeks and didn't want her making a mess of the lovely newly done out cottage, so I had to give her a good rub down with the towel. I gave Wendy my knee support to see if it'd help and luckily it fitted. It's not that I have really skinny girly legs or anything.....it's just really stretchy.....honest!

Wendy set about making lunch and I saw that there was a twitchable Richard's Pipit at Filey, which being a bogey bird for us, I really wanted to go and see. When I looked into it my heart sank because it was only possible to view if you were a member of Filey Bird Group.....Grrrrrrr! There seemed to be a lot of that sort of thing going on around the North East Coast. After lunch we took a quick spin to the Co-op in Flamborough to get something for us both to have for tea. Wendy took a huge risk and chose a quorn cottage pie, which she was bound to think was vile. Next we went a hunt for the chemist, which took ages to find and involved going round in circles again just like when we tried to find the Co-op.....Doh! When we got back to HQ there was most horrible ear piercing



screeching coming from the bottom of the garden. We knew what was happening, a Sparrowhawk had just caught something, but what? It turned out to be a lovely Redwing, so we were gutted but the Sparrowhawk needed to eat something and with the huge influx of Redwing over the past couple of days they weren't in short supply. I wanted to go out and explore South Landing but Wendy's knee was so painful that she made the tough decision to stay at home and miss out. I didn't take Lyca out with me as Wendy wanted her to keep her company, so for a change I'd be hands free....Yes! Lyca wasn't complaining either and was curled up on the settee sleeping, so off I went at 2.10pm.

I arrived at South Landing at 2.23pm and decided to do the coastal walks. Walking down the track to the Lifeboat station, the bushes in the valley looked amazing.



Coastal bushes

In there was a Grey Squirrel and an active Badger Sett, which was nice to see. Nearer the beach about 1 billion screaming kids were making their way up, which appeared to be some sort of school trip and they'd all been rock-pooling. I really felt for the poor teachers, they looked at their wits end! Down on the beach I turned east and went up the extremely steep steps to go along the coastal path to a place called Booted Gully. I'm guessing it's called that after having a Booted Warbler in it? It looked brilliant there with some bushes in a small depression right on the cliff edge but typically there was nothing there, even with me pishing!



Approaching Booted Gully

I turned round at that point and headed back to South landing. Enjoying the scenery as I went.



Nice

When I got to South landing I thought about heading back to the car but instead decided to keep walking west along the coastal path so I could see the southern edge of Dane's Dyke where there'd been a Red-flanked Bluetail last year. Since I was down on the beach I then had to go up some hideously steep steps on the other side of the valley.





Beach

These steps were so bad I had to stop halfway up and catch my breath! Once I'd finally reached the top I started to see Yellowhammers, Reed Buntings and Tree Sparrows constantly, which is something that you can only dream about now in the Isle of Man! I then came across a field that look absolutely perfect for Richard's Pipit but try as I might I couldn't find one.



Looked good

A bit further on I came across a nice shallow flooded area, which looked great to attract tired migrants but apart from seeing another active Badger Settle above it there was nothing at the waters edge. At the side of the stubble field I flushed a Bunting but it flew over the cliff and I never saw it again.....Urrghhhh!

In the distance I could see Bridlington, which was a nice view but I'm sure that the town itself is a right dump :).





Distant Bridlington

I finally reached Dane's Dyke, which felt much further than the 1 mile away and was a bit disappointing.



Dane's Dyke

I'm sure that if I'd gone walking inland into the woods it would've been more impressive and that when things are kicking off, Dane's Dyke would be a major place to check but on this day there wasn't a single bird. I didn't have time to go searching in the woods so I turned round to head back. In a small valley on the edge of the wood I heard loud noises coming from deep in the bushes. I stood around thinking that it might've been a Deer but then thought, "Hmm I'm in North East England!" After deciding that it could easily be a mental serial killer I decided to scoot off!





Scary bushes!

Back where I'd had the Bunting before I found a section of bushes right on the cliff edge and it was covered in them.



Bunting bushes

I checked every single one, feeling optimistic that I was going to find a Little Bunting in there but I didn't and they were all just Reed Buntings.



Reed Bunting

Nothing else exciting happened apart from when I was back at the car at 4.19pm and 3x Bullfinches seemingly came to say, "Bye bye" to me. I wouldn't be seeing another one of them for around 6 months or any other English bird we don't get at home for that matter, as this was the last bit of birding I did on the holiday :(.

My fit-bit was showing that I'd done 16,000 steps during the day, which was OK and more than Wendy or Lyca.

When I got home it was 4.25pm and Wendy made me go and get all our clothes out of the washing machine, so she could hang them on the radiators to dry. On the way I got collared by the owner, who kept me talking for 30minutes!!!! When I went back in our tea was ready, which not surprisingly neither of enjoyed in the slightest.....Yuk! While I ate mine I checked the wind forecast again and hilariously storm Ophelia was going to be at its peak at the exact time of our sailing.....Eek! We really had to think about our options quickly and one was for us to leave that evening and try to get into a Travelodge for the night and then see if there was any room on the 12.30pm sailing tomorrow. The other option was to wake up early, do a final check on the weather and if the overnight Saturday/Sunday boat looked like it was going to be cancelled then change the ticket to the earlier 12.30pm boat on Saturday, if that was going. That would mean taking our chance in the dog lounge if we could even get in it. We decided that instead of abandoning ship right away we would go for the latter plan and I'd get up at 5am and check the Steam Packet website. The prospect of getting up that early wasn't great but we really needed to get on that boat, so we were able to spend our last night in HQ at least. Wendy started to pack our stuff and did as much of the cleaning as she could, so we could make a quick get away if we needed to. It'd been a bit of a rubbish day for her, our last night was fraught with worry and not how we expected to end our otherwise enjoyable holiday. By 9.40pm we thought we'd better try and get some sleep before the alarm went off at stupid o'clock :(.



Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October

I'd been awake since 3am and couldn't go back to sleep, so it was only Wendy who was rudely awakened by the alarm at 5am. I looked at the weather forecast and Steam Packet website and there was absolutely no way our overnight boat was going anywhere....Uh oh! The website hadn't said it was cancelled yet, just that there'd be a final decision at 2pm or something. We couldn't wait that long and since the 12.30pm boat was showing as going as scheduled we had no other option but to change our ticket to that boat and get going right away. This meant we'd lost the dog cabin and Travelodge for the evening.....Grrrrrr! Loosing the dog cabin was gutting because there was no way Wendy's back would be able to cope sitting in the tiny and uncomfortable seats in the dog lounge and the stress of Lyca acting up with all the other dogs in there would be terrible. There was also the even bigger worry of that the dog lounge was full and in the strong winds they wouldn't open the outside deck up. If that was the case then we'd have to come off the boat as there was no way we were prepared to leave Lyca in the car on her own for the sailing. There was no time to sit worrying though and at least we knew we were giving ourselves the best change of getting home albeit on a rough crossing. We jumped out of bed and it was all systems go to get out and on our way as quickly as possible. The worst case scenario was that we'd get all the way over to the west coast and the 12.30pm boat would be cancelled, so we'd have to stay in a Travelodge until we could get the next boat home. My sat nav reckoned it'd take 3hours 16minutes to get to Heysham, so just to err on the side of caution I planned for 4hours. If we hit any big delays then we'd be in big trouble and would risk missing the boat.....Aarrghhhhh! We had breakfast, Wendy made the sarnies, emptied the fridge, cleaned and packed everything up before I loaded it all into the car....Phew! It was still pitch black outside when we finally gave HQ a final check over in case we'd forgotten something and closed the door at 6.57am :(.



Leaving in the dark

We didn't even have time to feel sad about the holiday coming to an end, as we were now on a mission to just get home.

It still felt like the middle of the night as I drove away and we hadn't got very far when we flushed a Snipe from the middle of the road. It hurtled itself skywards

and not much further down the road we flushed another. Wendy was feeling quite sick due to being anxious about the day ahead, so it probably wasn't the best time for me to spit out a tonsil stone.....Bleurrghhh! She instantly started to wretch loudly, which set us both off laughing in between her stomach threatening to throw her breakfast up all over my car. Luckily it subsided with no consequences but I'd started to feel as though my IBS was going to kick off sometime soon too. I tried to stay as calm as I could in the hope that I could stop it getting too bad but it was difficult to say the least. There was absolutely no wind in East Yorkshire, so it was hard to imagine that everyone was battenning down the hatches and preparing for the worst on the west coast. With no evidence of any storm it was impossible to gauge if the boat would be going or not. All I knew was that if the morning boat left Douglas then we'd definitely be going, as the Steam packet wouldn't send it out from Douglas if it couldn't get back. Luckily my Dad texted me to tell us that the Ben had left Douglas at 7.25am and was on its way to Heysham, so that was our first worry over.....Phew!

There was no time for any stop off on this journey to Heysham but Wendy's bladder was at bursting point, so I had to pull in at Ferrybridge Services. While she'd gone I let Lyca out too seeing as she wouldn't be having a walk and we didn't fancy having to take her out onto the deck of the boat. Wendy was much happier when she got back although she was still feeling sick and we could hear the calls of constant streams of Redwing going over the car park. With no time to spare I set off again after our 5minute break and as far as we were aware it was still a nice calm windless day. That was until we got to the other side of the Pennines and all of a sudden we had strong wind hitting us.....Uh oh! The difference was so unbelievably instant it didn't seem possible but it was finally there for all to see. Wendy started to worry that the crossing was going to be horrendous and that we didn't have a cabin to lie down in and avoid all the sound effects from the other passengers as they puked up all the greasy food they'd just eaten from the café :( We saw the 1<sup>st</sup> **Buzzard** we'd seen since leaving Norfolk over some fields at the side of the road.

When we got to Heysham it was 10.28am and we breathed a sigh of relief that we hadn't got stuck in any traffic...Phew! We'd made it in good time and the boat was scheduled to be leaving on time, so the only thing left to worry about was how busy the dog lounge was and the rough crossing.

The woman in the ticket hut accepted my ticket and I started to drive through but instantly got pulled over to be searched. It'd been a while since being searched at Heysham, so was probably overdue but it was quick and obviously they didn't find anything dodgy. When we parked up we were only the 7<sup>th</sup> car there and I took Lyca out again hoping that she'd perform before getting on the boat. It was good news that we were 7<sup>th</sup> as that meant we could rush up to the dog lounge and hopefully get a seat! Lyca only did a wee, which wasn't what I wanted and the wind didn't seem that bad in the dock, which was weird and I started to wonder if the eye of the storm had hit us already...? As we sat there I checked the marine traffic app on my phone and the Ben was nowhere to be seen, I couldn't find it anywhere! Luckily it hadn't sunk and the icon was just hiding behind another ship....Hahahahaha :P. There didn't seem to be any other cars with dogs, so there was still some hope that the dog lounge would be quiet. The Ben arrived at 11.10am and we looked closely at the passengers driving off to see if any of them were green but they all seemed OK. I got a report through of a Ring Ouzel at Beacon Hill where I'd been yesterday afternoon....Nooooooo! The most recent weather forecast was pointing towards a drop in wind speed, so we



kept our fingers crossed that it was right. At 11.33am the foot passengers were called and although it's always an irritation this time it affected us because we didn't have a cabin. What if loads of foot passengers had dogs and there were no seats left when we got on? We were finally called at 11.56pm (23minutes after the foot passengers!!) and we drove on and parked up, still feeling gutted that we'd lost our cabin.

Unbelievably and to my great relief the dog lounge was empty when we went in and we sat down to sample the new and notoriously uncomfortable seats. They were even worse than we'd expected and Wendy was really worried about her back but there was loads of floor space for dogs! It wasn't long before the door swung open and a couple with a miniature Dachshund came in and sat down. We assumed them to be the first of many but luckily Lyca didn't seem that bothered by them. Wendy suggested going to the desk to ask if they could put our names down for a dog cabin if one became available. It was a long shot but at least we would've tried, so I went to the desk and asked to have my name put down but as there is only 2 dog cabins on the whole boat I didn't hold any hopes. When I got back Wendy went to the WC's and I overheard the other couple talking about the uncomfortable seats and the man said that would go and ask about a cabin. I was so glad that I'd acted swiftly and got in ahead of them. When he got back he said they'd all been taken, so my heart sank. I thought it was a bit odd that the lady hadn't said that to me but then I presumed that both cabins would've been filled by then.....Bugger :(. A few seconds later I heard the customer announcement bong and assumed it was something to do with the shop. I only half listened but nearly had a heart attack when I heard, "Would passenger Hadfield please come to the information desk?" WHAT????? Wendy still wasn't back so I was panicking that I'd have to go and hammer on the bog door or something. Luckily by the time I'd grabbed everything and got Lyca moving Wendy came out of the toilet door and having heard it too had a massive grin on her face. We couldn't believe it and could hardly contain our excitement as we walked to the desk where we were given the key to a dog cabin.....Woo Hoo :O! The lady behind the desk said that she'd spotted that someone had the dog cabin booked but didn't have a dog, so she'd moved them to a normal cabin which freed up the dog cabin for us. How nice of her was that considering she didn't need to do it at all? Well done Steam Packet! As we went to the stairs another dog owner appeared and asked where the dog lounge was but I was way too excited and nearly shouted, "OVER THERE MATE" and we practically ran up the stairs. The bloke probably thought I'd been sniffing something in the toilets!! After we'd let ourselves into the cabin we couldn't resist a high five and even got Lyca in on the act. We did feel slightly guilty about leaving the others in the horrible dog lounge though but it just wasn't their lucky day. This stroke of good luck was almost too good to be true and we lay down on the beds in preparation for our rough ride. In celebration and probably from the excitement Wendy let out a ginormous fart and in my euphoric state I laughed for about 10minutes solid!! Hahaha.

As the Ben rolled its way out of the harbour we looked at each other and grimaced.....Bleurrghhhh! It wasn't too bad till we cleared Fleetwood then all hell broke loose. As the wind was hitting the side of the boat the rolling was terrifying. To say it was rough would be an understatement and it really was extremely unpleasant for the entire crossing. Lyca spent the majority of it sitting on top of Wendy panting frantically, so even she wasn't happy. She hopped off the bed a couple of times and staggered around on the floor to get a drink but quickly decided that it was a bad move and got back up on the bed.

I hoped that getting into the lee of the Isle of Man would calm things down and it did a little until the approach to the harbour. For some unknown reason the Captain brought the stabilisers in really early (maybe to avoid ropes or something) and we got hit side on by a big wave. The roll was so massive, I honestly thought we were going over.....Eeek! You could hear stuff crashing on the floor all over the boat it was so bad.....Horrible! Luckily enough the rolls subsided but I bet there was a few people who'd made it across without puking who then suddenly puked everywhere! To say that we were pleased to get into Douglas harbour at 4pm just wouldn't do it justice. We were so relieved to have made it home before the worst of the storm hit us but absolutely over the moon to have managed to get across in a cabin. I for one would've definitely been sick if I'd been lying on the dog lounge floor.

When we arrived home at 4.15pm there was scaffolding in place all around the house and our hopes that the roof would've been fixed before we got back looked even more ludicrous. Due to bad weather they'd not been able to do much at all, so we still had the worst of it to come :( Storm Ophelia came in, on cue, with a vengeance and all the sailings from then on were cancelled including the one we should've been on. We'd played the right card to come home early that's for sure. It wreaked havoc all over the place including the IOM but luckily the roof of the house survived even with the absence of any tiles. Apart from some water damage inside the house it could've been a lot worse.

All in all it'd been an enjoyable 2 weeks, both our HQ's had been superb and the weather had been kind to us. It'd been disappointingly quiet on the bird front for an October trip and apart from the Arctic Warbler there'd been nothing amazing to try to see. It was a lifer for us both though, and one we had dipped on several times before, so we can't grumble at that but if the conditions had been better who knows what else we could've seen. The Ring Ouzel situation really bugged us and with all the reports that'd come in we can only assume that they were strings :). Overall it was a shame to not get any run of Easterly winds but it'd been great to explore a new area. I really liked East Yorkshire but I think the lack of touristy style area (i.e. it was a dump... not my words!!) put Wendy off.



## Yorkshire map

