

# Honeyguide

**WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS**

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**Lincolnshire Wash  
6 – 10 June 2022**

## Holiday participants

June Cutler  
Ann & Mel Leggett  
Jillian Macready

Julia Maynard  
Julie Sherwood

**Leader**  
Rob Lucking

Report and lists by Rob Lucking.  
Photos by Rob Lucking (RL), Jillian Macready (JM) or as noted.  
Cover photos: Gibraltar Point and mouse-ear hawkweed (JM).



Group members at RSPB Frampton Marsh nature reserve (JM).



The group stayed at The Old King's Head, Kirton <https://theoldkingshead.com/> (above, JM).

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays likes to put something into nature conservation where we visit, on this occasion a donation of £40 per person to the RSPB, earmarked for the Society's Frampton Marsh nature reserve. With the addition of Gift Aid through the Honeyguide Charitable Trust, we were able to give £290 to the RSPB.

## Daily diary

### Monday 6 June

The group assembled at the Old King's Head after travelling to Lincolnshire from various locations – Oxfordshire, London and Shropshire – and we headed off to dinner at the Kirton Cottage restaurant just over the road. It had been recommended to us by John Badley, the RSPB Senior Site Manager for the Lincolnshire Wash, who joined us for dinner. The group enjoyed the Kirton Cottage so much we booked in for our final dinner of the holiday - praise indeed!

### Tuesday 7 June – Frampton Marsh

After meeting at the Old King's Head, we drove the short distance to RSPB Frampton Marsh, a relatively new RSPB wetland reserve created on former arable land which itself had been reclaimed from saltmarsh over 100 years previously.

We were met by Chris Andrews, the reserve's visitor officer, who told us what to look out for and we headed off down the path towards the main hide. The first part of our route took us alongside the water storage reservoir, which doubles up as a reedbed, and supplies water to the rest of the reserve. We watched and heard reed bunting and reed warbler in the reeds and a moorhen with two small young.

Along the path a pollen and nectar mix had been sown to benefit insects and next to it a wild bird seed mix had recently been drilled to provide seed food in the winter.

We were surrounded by the song of reed and sedge warblers. Both species have a very similar song but Rob explained an easy way to differentiate between the two. Sedge warblers are one of only two warblers in the UK that sing in flight (the other being whitethroat) and so a reed/sedge warbler seen singing in flight is always going to be a sedge. On our way down to 360 hide, a sedge warbler proved the point! On umbellifers here we found a number of thick-legged flower beetles and our first solitary bee, which unfortunately evaded Jillian and therefore identification!

The scrapes that 360 hide looks over were alive with birds – avocets and black-headed gulls with their chicks, two little gulls and numerous lapwings. When we arrived, Chris told us that a record count of 198 gadwalls had been made that morning and there certainly were a lot of gadwalls! We weren't tempted to try and beat the 198 but it did provide a good opportunity to see one of the best features to distinguish a female gadwall from a female mallard – the orange edge to the bill. We also saw both ringed and little ringed plovers and a single summer plumaged dunlin.



Little gull (JM) and painted river buoy (RL).

We stopped to admire the painted river buoy by the junction of the path. Two re-purposed marine navigation buoys have been installed at Frampton as part of a local arts project and painted by a local street artist.

As we climbed up onto the sea bank we found a single bee orchid by the steps. Chris had told us upon arrival that this was a good area for bee orchids and as we scanned the slopes we found several more flowering spikes.

The elevation of the sea bank also gave us a good view over the scrapes and Rob could explain the management regime. Over time, scrapes deteriorate as organic material in the mud is consumed by invertebrates. The invertebrate populations decline and there is less food available for waders. By periodically draining scrapes in the spring, allowing them to vegetate over the summer and then re-flooding them in the autumn you can add organic material back into the scrapes and boost invertebrate numbers for the following spring. At Frampton, the team goes a step further and sows a seed-bearing crop in the fallow scrape. When this is flooded in the autumn there is an abundance of seed which attracts thousands of wildfowl in the winter.

Out on the saltmarsh we saw our first redshank. The saltmarsh at Frampton is some of the most extensive in western Europe extending for over a mile from the sea bank. It is lightly grazed by cattle to create the right habitat conditions for breeding redshanks. Around 200 pairs of redshanks breed on the Frampton saltmarsh every year.



Cattle grazing on saltmarsh at Frampton (JM); bee orchid (RL).

The wet grassland at the base of the sea bank was full of life – more avocets and lapwings – and a partially hidden white bird turned out to be a decoy spoonbill! A pair of spoonbills had attempted to nest on the reserve the previous year but were unsuccessful as they had started too late in the season. In an attempt to attract them to start earlier, some decoys were put out on the marsh and have been catching out visitors ever since!

We dropped back down off the sea bank and started our walk back up the path to the visitor centre for lunch. We had been told that there was a pair of unseasonal long-tailed ducks around but hadn't caught up with them until we saw the male repeatedly diving in a wide ditch through an area of wet grassland. Long-tailed ducks are typically winter visitors to Lincolnshire so to see one in mid-summer was most unexpected.



Long-tailed duck (Roy Harvey).

After lunch we took a different circular loop around part of the reserve known as Marsh Farm. This is an area of wet grassland owned by the Environment Agency, which commissioned the RSPB to create and maintain the habitat to offset the loss of coastal grazing marsh to sea level rise. The path took us between a double hedge where we saw speckled wood butterflies and, from a viewpoint over a small pond, our first broad-bodied chaser dragonfly.

At the end of the hedge, where the path opened out onto open farmland, we heard a distant cuckoo, and there were both little and great crested grebes on the water storage reservoir that feeds water into the wet grassland.

Out not the grassland there were several grey herons and little egrets and another surprise species – a whooper swan! A small herd of whooper swans winters at Frampton but this bird had turned up a few days earlier. It didn't appear injured and so might have just been lazy!

A small flock of seven barnacle geese was less of a surprise given the expanding naturalised population on the east coast. Two of the geese had blue numbered rings on their legs. They had been ringed at Holkham Park on the north Norfolk coast the previous summer as part of a wider study to see how far birds from this naturalised population range and whether they mix with the migratory Svalbard and Greenland populations.

It had been long but fruitful day at Frampton Marsh and the weather had been exceptional. The group retired back to the Old King's Head and we met in the evening for the daily log and dinner at the Black Bull in Kirton.

### **Wednesday 8 June – Gibraltar Point & Freiston Shore**

After meeting up after breakfast at the Old Kings Head, it was a longer drive today to the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve at Gibraltar Point. Despite its proximity to the seaside holiday town of Skegness, Gibraltar Point is a quiet haven for wildlife and broadly consists of two parallel ridges of sand dunes with saltmarsh between. The western dunes are now home to a golf course, but the eastern dunes are largely unspoilt thanks to the intervention of Lincolnshire County Council in the 1930s who bought the reserve to prevent it from being built on.

We walked out over the old saltmarsh seeing meadow pipits, a superb short-eared owl and a more distant spoonbill. Mel noticed some old metal posts with the letters TTD stamped on them and we speculated what the letters might stand for. We'll come back to this later...



[Mysterious metal posts at Gibraltar Point \(RL\).](#)

In the distance we could see the Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory and the Heligoland trap used to catch migrating birds for ringing. The observatory itself is based in some old WW2 buildings of which there are many scattered across the reserve.

We continued into the eastern dunes and the damper dune slack vegetation was full of yellow rattle, a semi-parasitic plant on grasses which is often planted as part of wildflower mixes to avoid grasses becoming over dominant. Among the yellow rattle we also found southern marsh orchid and pyramidal orchid, both lovers of calcareous soils.

Walking out onto the beach we were hoping for little terns, one of the speciality species of Gibraltar Point. Among the piled-up heaps of hornwrack – a colony of tiny animals known as bryozoans – we found some interesting artefacts.



Gibraltar Point beach, on the right with exposed peat (JM).

There were several suspicious-looking brown lumps which turned out to be chunks of peat. These had probably been transported from further up the coast where remains of old forests from when there was land bridge between the UK and Northern Europe can be found on the foreshore.

We also found several examples of the slipper limpet, a North American species that has been introduced to our waters in ships' ballast water. It now forms dense colonies on mussel beds on The Wash and is a 'sequential hermaphrodite'. Slipper limpets form stacks of up to twelve animals with the largest at the bottom being female and all those on top males. When the female dies, the next largest male changes sex and becomes female.

We cut back into the dunes to walk back towards the visitor centre for lunch and bumped into one of LWT's volunteers – another Rob – who told us more of the history of the reserve including the mystery of the metal posts we had seen earlier with the letters TTD stamped on them. Years ago, there had been a boundary dispute between two wildfowlers who leased the saltmarsh for shooting. In order to settle the dispute, metal posts were sunk into the marsh with one wildfowler's initials on one side and the other's on the reverse. As we walked back we looked at the reverse side of the metal posts and sure enough, there was a different set of initials – LDB!

After lunch we walked down to Lill's hut, an adapted WW2 searchlight post, which is now used as a viewpoint over The Wash. We saw several common seals hauled out on the sands and some large groups of herring gulls. In the distance we could see the north Norfolk coast and Julia was able to spot her flat in Hunstanton!

As we headed off back towards Boston, we stopped briefly at one of the hides overlooking Tennyson's Sands, a newer part of the reserve with several freshwater pools. We were amused to see a pair of black-headed gulls nesting on the roof of one of the hides. There was a pair of great crested grebes nesting on an island opposite the hide and one of the adults hauled itself out of the water and waddled ungainly across to the nest. Grebes are adapted to an aquatic life and their legs are placed right at the rear of their body – great for swimming but not for walking!

We had an hour or so spare so we dropped into the RSPB's Freiston Shore reserve. Freiston is another relatively new reserve and is one of the first ever 'managed realignment' schemes in the UK where land that was earlier claimed from intertidal habitats is restored back to intertidal. In the case of Freiston Shore, the sea bank that was built in the mid-1970s, to create arable farmland to supply North Sea Camp prison with fresh food, was built too far out into The Wash and was very susceptible to erosion. The RSPB was able to purchase the land and working in partnership with the Environment Agency and Boston Borough Council created three breaches in the sea wall to allow the sea back in and salt marsh to re-form. The sea bank that ran along the landward side of the reserve has to be strengthened with clay that was excavated from the reserve. The resultant hole was re-profiled into a shallow lagoon with islands for breeding birds.

From the hide we could see an island with breeding black-headed gulls and common terns. The black-headed gulls had chicks but the later-nesting common terns were still on eggs. A pair of herring gulls was nesting on a nearby island. We suddenly heard a commotion and one of the herring gulls had nipped over to the other island, grabbed a black-headed gull chick and ate it!

Dinner tonight was at another restaurant recommended by John Badley – the Thatched Cottage in nearby Sutterton. Again the food was excellent as was the range of services offered – not only food and drink but a fishing lake, a caravan site and a green burial ground!

### Thursday 9 June – The Wash

Today was the day of our boat trip out into The Wash. For many years the South Lincolnshire RSPB Group has chartered the Boston Belle to take people out into The Wash and most years over 100 bird species have been recorded. Volunteers from the group act as spotters on the boat and Chris Andrews, who we met at Frampton on Tuesday, was the commentator on today's trip.

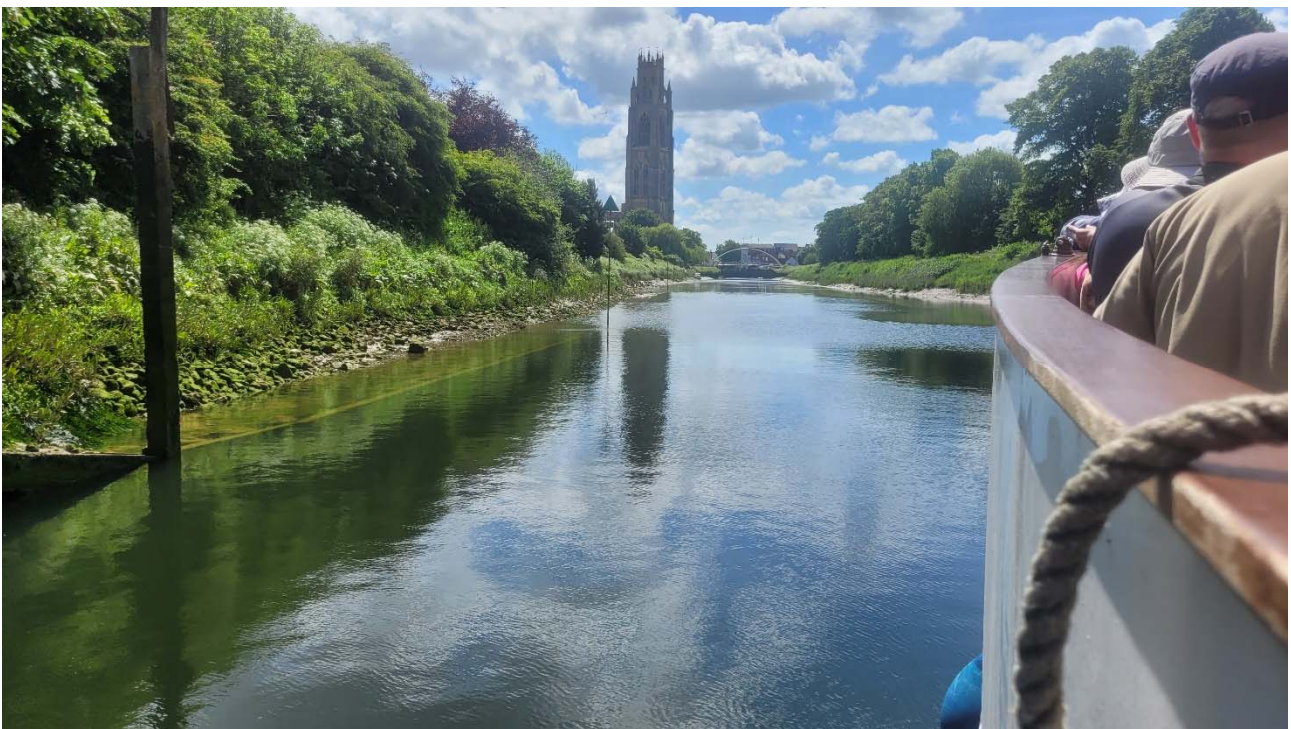
The boat departs from Boston Grand Sluice where very handily there is a nice coffee shop overlooking the river. We scanned Boston Stump (the local name for St Botolph's church) for the peregrines that nest on the church most years but to no avail. A grey wagtail briefly flitted around the lock gates.



Boat trip day; right, on board the Boston Belle (JM).

The Boston Belle arrived from its moorings upstream and we all boarded. Before we could set off there was the delicate operation of navigating Boston Grand Sluice Lock, which is only just big enough for the Boston Belle to fit in. After much pushing and shoving (and the odd nasty sounding crunch) we were in and were gently lowered from the River Witham into The Haven, the tidal section of the river that connects Boston to The Wash.

We headed down The Haven, past Boston Stump – reputedly the largest parish church in England, the Port of Boston and Frampton Marsh and out into The Wash. On the edge of the water we saw three eiders – one young drake and two females – among more numerous shelducks. A pilot boat from the Port of Boston came past us at high speed to meet a small freighter coming into the port.



Boston Belle heading towards Boston Stump (JM).

The Boston Belle headed out into The Wash for a short distance before turning and entering the navigation channel of the River Welland, one of the other four main rivers that drain out into The Wash. The banks of the Welland are less steep than the banks of the Haven and hence much better for wildlife, including the common

or harbour seals that haul out after pupping. We saw around 150 seals and Chris our commentator kept us all amused with an almost endless supply of appalling seal-related puns and jokes.

On edge of the saltmarsh we saw three brent geese, usually winter visitors but a small number spend the summer on The Wash, several curlews and a small flock of roosting oystercatchers. We also saw several raptors – marsh harrier, red kite, buzzard and kestrel – but unfortunately the peregrines eluded us.

The trip back into The Haven was uneventful but we managed to add a few new species to the day list including stock dove, yellowhammer and sand martin. In total we recorded 54 species.

By popular demand, we returned to the Kirton Cottage for dinner where the food was, once again, excellent.

### **Friday 10 June – Willow Tree Fen**

This was an optional visit for those who wanted and as it was pretty much on the way home for most people, the whole group came along.

Willow Tree Fen is another Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve situated between Spalding and Bourne along the River Glen. It was created from former arable land and is now a more natural fen with a mixture of shallow pools, reedbeds, hay meadows and seasonally flooded pasture. During the 2020 Covid lockdown, a pair of cranes turned up and nested and have become almost resident on the reserve, only departing for a short period of time in the middle of winter. Consequently, public access to the reserve has been severely curtailed and it can now only be viewed from a viewpoint in the car park staffed by LWT volunteers.

We arrived and were met by a very helpful volunteer who told us that the cranes had only been heard that morning but that they had two chicks. From the viewpoint we had excellent views over the reserve which seemed full of marsh harriers: at least four were on view, along with several buzzards, including a young male that flew right in front of us giving point-blank views.

Two grey partridges scuttled across the track in front of the viewpoint and we heard a distant cuckoo. A mystery sound we couldn't immediately place turned out to be chickens (!) and our only great spotted woodpecker of the trip called from some trees behind us.

Unfortunately, the cranes weren't visible and, as everyone had a long journey home, we left Willow Tree Fen at around midday and headed our separate ways.



Willow Tree Fen (RL).



## Wildlife lists

### BIRDS

<b>Great crested grebe</b>	seen at Frampton, Gibraltar Point and from the Boston Belle
<b>Little grebe</b>	seen at Frampton & Gibraltar Point
<b>Cormorant</b>	small numbers seen daily
<b>Little egret</b>	small numbers seen daily
<b>Grey heron</b>	small numbers seen daily
<b>Spoonbill</b>	one flew past at Gibraltar Point
<b>Mute swan</b>	seen daily. Three in flight at Willow Tree Fen did a good impression of cranes!
<b>Whooper swan</b>	one at Frampton Marsh
<b>Greylag goose</b>	common at Frampton Marsh & Gibraltar Point. Several pairs at Willow Tree Fen.
<b>Canada goose</b>	several at Frampton, Gibraltar Point and a group on The Haven also contained a hybrid Canada x greylag goose - Canlag or Grenada?
<b>Barnacle goose</b>	seven at Frampton including two colour-ringed birds from Holkham Park in Norfolk
<b>Brent goose</b>	two on The Wash cruise
<b>Shelduck</b>	seen at Frampton, Gibraltar Point, Freiston Shore and from the Boston Belle
<b>Wigeon</b>	two at Frampton
<b>Gadwall</b>	large flock (198) at Frampton and a pair at Willow Tree Fen
<b>Teal</b>	one at Frampton
<b>Mallard</b>	seen daily at all wetland sites
<b>Shoveler</b>	several at Frampton including a female with a brood of chicks
<b>Pochard</b>	several on the reedbed at Frampton
<b>Tufted duck</b>	several on the reedbed at Frampton and the
<b>Eider</b>	three from the Boston Belle
<b>Long-tailed duck</b>	a drake at Frampton
<b>Red kite</b>	one by the River Welland from the Boston Belle
<b>Marsh harrier</b>	seen at Gibraltar Point, from the Boston Belle and very well at Willow Tree Farm
<b>Buzzard</b>	several at Gibraltar Point, from the Boston Belle and at Willow Tree Farm
<b>Kestrel</b>	seen at Frampton, Gibraltar Point and from the Boston Belle
<b>Grey partridge</b>	two at Willow Tree Farm
<b>Pheasant</b>	heard at Frampton and Gibraltar Point, seen from the Boston Belle and at Willow Tree Fen
<b>Moorhen</b>	seen daily
<b>Coot</b>	several with small chicks at Frampton and at Gibraltar Point
<b>Oystercatcher</b>	seen at Frampton and Gibraltar Point and a small roosting flock from the Boston Belle
<b>Avocet</b>	lots with chicks at Frampton. Also seen at Gibraltar Point, Freiston Shore and from the Boston Belle
<b>Ringed plover</b>	several at Frampton and from the Boston Belle
<b>Little ringed plover</b>	two at Frampton
<b>Lapwing</b>	seen daily at all wetland sites visited
<b>Dunlin</b>	one adult in summer plumage at Frampton and several from the Boston Belle
<b>Black-tailed godwit</b>	a few at Frampton and Gibraltar Point
<b>Curlew</b>	several on the salt marsh at Frampton and from the Boston Belle
<b>Redshank</b>	several at Frampton, Gibraltar Point, Freiston Shore and from the Boston Belle
<b>Turnstone</b>	five at Frampton and from the Boston Belle
<b>Black-headed gull</b>	very common breeding species at Frampton. Also nesting at Gibraltar Point and Freiston Shore and seen from the Boston Belle
<b>Lesser black-backed gull</b>	seen in small numbers at Frampton, Gibraltar Point and from the Boston Belle
<b>Herring gull</b>	seen at all wetland sites visited
<b>Great black-backed gull</b>	small numbers at Gibraltar Point and from the Boston Belle
<b>Little gull</b>	2-3 at Frampton
<b>Common tern</b>	seen at Frampton, Gibraltar Point and from the Boston Belle. Nesting at Freiston Shore
<b>Feral pigeon</b>	seen at Freiston Shore, in Boston and from the Boston Belle
<b>Stock dove</b>	two from the Boston Belle
<b>Woodpigeon</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Collared dove</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Cuckoo</b>	heard at Frampton and Willow Tree Fen
<b>Short-eared owl</b>	one at Gibraltar Point
<b>Barn owl</b>	one from the Boston Belle
<b>Swift</b>	seen throughout

<b>Great spotted woodpecker</b>	one heard at Willow Tree Fen
<b>Skylark</b>	seen throughout
<b>Sand martin</b>	only seen from the Boston Belle
<b>Swallow</b>	seen throughout
<b>House martin</b>	seen throughout
<b>Meadow pipit</b>	sent throughout in suitable habitat
<b>Grey wagtail</b>	one in Boston by the lock
<b>Pied wagtail</b>	seen throughout
<b>Wren</b>	small numbers seen or heard daily
<b>Dunnock</b>	seen at Frampton and Gibraltar Point
<b>Robin</b>	seen at Frampton and Gibraltar Point
<b>Blackbird</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Sedge warbler</b>	very common at Frampton and several seen at Gibraltar Point
<b>Reed warbler</b>	very common at Frampton. Also seen & heard at Gibraltar Point and at Willow Tree Fen
<b>Blackcap</b>	heard singing at Frampton and Gibraltar Point
<b>Whitethroat</b>	heard and seen at Frampton, Gibraltar Point and from the Boston Belle
<b>Chiffchaff</b>	heard singing at Gibraltar Point and from the Boston Belle
<b>Long-tailed tit</b>	seen in the hedge at Freiston Shore
<b>Blue tit</b>	small numbers at Frampton and at Freiston Shore
<b>Great tit</b>	seen at Freiston Shore
<b>Magpie</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Jackdaw</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Rook</b>	only seen at Gibraltar Point
<b>Carrion crow</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Starling</b>	seen throughout. Very pale starling on the salt marsh at Frampton.
<b>House sparrow</b>	common in Kirton village throughout and also seen at Freiston Shore
<b>Chaffinch</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Goldfinch</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Linnet</b>	small numbers seen throughout
<b>Reed bunting</b>	common at Frampton and several seen at Willowtree Fen.
<b>Yellowhammer</b>	one from the Boston Belle



Turnstones, Frampton Marsh and great crested grebes, Freiston Shore (JM).

<b>Mammals</b>
Harbour seal
Rabbit
<b>Butterflies</b>
Large white
Common blue
Red admiral
Painted lady
Small tortoiseshell
Speckled wood
Small heath

<b>Dragonflies and damselflies</b>
Common blue damselfly
Blue-tailed damselfly
Broad-bodied chaser
<b>Other invertebrates</b>
Solitary bees - <i>Andrena</i> sp., <i>Osmia</i> sp. & <i>Lassioglossum</i> sp.
Sexton beetle
Thick-legged flower beetle
Chequered click beetle <i>Prosternon tessellatum</i>