



# *Honeyguide*

**WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS**

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Norfolk break  
17 – 21 May 2021



## Participants

George Malcolm and Sonia Donaghy  
Margaret Dixey

Anne McGregor  
Gail Wilson

**Leader:** Chris Durdin

The group stayed at the Oaklands Hotel in Thorpe St Andrew <https://oaklands-hotel.co.uk>

Report and lists by Chris Durdin.

Chinese water deer by Sonia Donaghy, other photos by Chris Durdin.

Cover, top: orange tip butterfly on garlic mustard, Thorpe Marshes.

Cover, below: NWT Upton Marshes.



Above, top: Meadow Dyke, Horsey.  
Below: marsh marigolds, Boat Dyke at Upton.

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays always tries to put something into nature conservation where we visit, and a donation of £40 per person to Norfolk Wildlife Trust was our way of contributing this time.

## DAILY DIARY

### Monday 17 May – arrival

Anne and Gail arrived by train to Norwich railway station, Margaret, George and Sonia by car. Anne went to Thorpe Marshes and saw many things the group would see tomorrow, plus two little egrets. It was a quiet evening, apart from a singing blackcap, on the large terrace at the Oaklands Hotel on the hotel's first night out of lockdown; perhaps being a wet Monday was a factor. A good meal, nonetheless.

### Tuesday 18 May – NWT Thorpe Marshes and RSPB Strumpshaw Fen

The day started with lovely weather – I was in shorts – as we took the short walk to Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Thorpe Marshes nature reserve, my 'local patch'. We paused to look at witches' brooms on a birch and many ruderal flowers by the road, including yellow wall rocket, storksbill and various cranesbills. Anne had gone ahead and met us on the railway bridge and showed us a garden warbler singing in the open ash tree with the leaning trunk. Once on the reserve we quickly had good views of a sedge warbler and there were many with us all morning. Cetti's and willow warblers were singing.

Turning through the marshes, we studied the ovipositing scars of willow emerald damselflies on a willow sapling leaning over a ditch. Near this was a nice clump of lady's smock and the first of many plants of wintercress, species undecided with this difficult genus. A flying kestrel and a more distant sparrowhawk were good, but topped by a cuckoo flying past. We saw it three times during the morning, but it didn't call – a female, perhaps.

Near the cattle corral with the spindle tree, Anne was alert to a green woodpecker in tree on the other side of the railway line. Here we heard a grasshopper warbler, but couldn't see it. Generally, the same was true for reed warblers, though we did see two near the next bend but one. Reed buntings were easier, as ever. There was a pair of gadwalls in a ditch. A surprise at Thorpe Marshes this year is that stonechats, usually a wintering bird on Norfolk's marshes, seem to be summering. Whether they are nesting is to be established, but this morning we had a good view of the male on a big hawthorn.

There are generally many fewer birds in spring and summer on the gravel pit, St Andrew's Broad, though with great crested grebes, a coot, three male tufted ducks and a gadwall it was far from birdless. A mute swan on a nest was accompanied by two others, which felt like one too many. Golden clumps of marsh marigolds provided splashes of colour in several places and with them, on the other side of the river, was a single plant of giant hogweed.

This cold and damp spring has meant that damselflies have been late to emerge, though there were a few fluttery teneral common blue damselflies. Gail found a large red damselfly and repeated the trick in my garden after lunch. When the sun shone a few butterflies were moving: peacock, small tortoiseshell and a confiding orange tip. We studied a fungus that produces galls on alexanders – see photos with wildlife lists.

Back near we'd started there was a whitethroat in song flight, our ninth warbler species. On the bottom step on the bridge Anne saw a common lizard and over the bridge, as on the outward route there were linnets in the rough field by Whitlingham Lane; this time a male, albeit not a colourful one, perched out in the open. Walking up Thunder Lane it started to rain, but we were close enough to my home to avoid a soaking. Coffee/tea and lunch in the garden moved to the conservatory, followed by slices of Julie's homemade lemon cake. In the meantime, the sun came out again for pottering in the garden.



Linnet, in Thorpe St Andrew (digiscoped).

We gathered ourselves back at Oaklands Hotel and drove to the RSPB's Strumpshaw Fen nature reserve. We'd plainly had the best of today's weather though that didn't prevent good views of marsh harriers on several occasions. We walked along 'sandy wall' and were lucky enough to be close to Fen Hide when the heavens opened. While we waited for the rain to ease, we enjoyed the sighting of a Chinese water deer with a small fawn.



We reached the River Yare but threatening clouds prompted an about turn, rather than trying to complete a circuit. Sonia showed us some magnificent oak apples, one of several galls noted today: Honeyguider Mervin Nethercoat would be proud of us. Back at the start of sandy wall I walked towards the meadow with the Highland cows and was surprised to disturb a great white egret which flew from its hiding place in a ditch.

We returned to reception and watched over Strumpshaw Broad for a while. Marsh harriers were there as expected, though the highlight was a good view of a flying hobby. Two muntjacs were by the railway line as we headed back to the car park, where there was a male bullfinch for Margaret and me as we were first to arrive.



King Alfred's cakes, fungi on an ash log at Strumpshaw Fen; view from reception hide over Strumpshaw Broad.

### **Wednesday 19 May – Horsey and NWT Hickling**

We gathered under the singing goldcrest in the car park at Oaklands Hotel and were away at 09:00. The carrot for that prompt departure was a boat trip on Horsey Mere. Horsey Mill's car park was all but empty when we arrived and, after a briefing, we went aboard Ross's boat, past an onboard swallow nest under construction. It was a perfect spring morning as we cruised across Horsey Mere and up Meadow Dyke. Ross gave a constant stream of information about the Broads, Horsey and the wildlife around us – so a delight for me to sit and just enjoy. Common terns perched on poles and there was constant movement of marsh harriers and several buzzards. Ross said his favourite song is reed warbler, which must help when being out at Horsey is your day job. We heard a bittern boom, and another highlight was a crane flying past and then the sound of bugling cranes from a hidden place in the reeds.

Back at Horsey Mill was the ideal place to stop for coffee. We were discussing plant ID apps but soon discovered that activating the 'Sonia app' topped anything on a smartphone. The immediate reason was mouse-ears: I know I appreciated the tutorial about the erect, yellowy-green sticky mouse-ear that grew conveniently adjacent to some common mouse-ear. We noted wall speedwell and lesser trefoil on the same grassy bank.

With a little time in hand, we simply crossed the coast road and took a walk towards, but not reaching, the sand dunes in the distance. Gail repeated a trick she'd shown us last autumn on soft rush: she stripped half of the outer layer to then push out, with a fingernail, a string of 'foam rubber' – latex-like material – that might, according to one story, be shaped into the initial of your future spouse. One of the walk's highlights was a swallow with a very full beak of mud right by the first gate, on the return. The weather looked distinctly threatening at that point, but it came to nothing. In the end, once we reached Hickling, we had the most glorious afternoon.

We had our picnics on a table by NWT Hickling Broad reserve's information centre, followed by some words of welcome from NWT's Nick Morritt. As we entered the reserve proper, there was a splendidly visible willow warbler singing in a small birch. From the first hide, a bittern flew past – quickly, as ever, so blink and you'd miss it. Bearded tits called as we continued around the circuit. Jade-green tiger beetles ran at a rate of knots on the stony path with big patches of climbing corydalis on the side of the path. Galls caught our eye: scores of cigar galls on reeds and currant galls on oaks. Damselflies were fluttering here and there and at one point, just before a Naturetrek group caught up with us, there were the very similar species of variable and azure damselflies together.

It was quite a day for hobbies, with several on show from bittern hide over the 'bearded tit nestbox'. On Brendan's marsh we found our first shelducks and avocets. We were back just before closing time at the reserve's centre, though departure was delayed with my car not starting. George and NWT's Nick gave lifts back to base for the group. A safe and sunny car park with a calling cuckoo was the nicest place I can

remember to wait for a breakdown help to boost an empty battery that was beyond what ordinary jump leads could sort out.



Brendan's marsh, Hickling and NWT's visitor centre at Hickling. Plenty of time for photographs while I waited for a jump start!

#### Thursday 20 May – Buxton Heath and Kelling Heath

A cool and cloudy morning, but at least (this morning, anyway), without rain. The heath's Dartmoor ponies were in view as soon as we arrived, and later we were very close to the rest of the management team, some British white cattle. The weather was far from ideal but on we pressed, a fairly steady walk around the whole of the dry part of the heath. Singing, perched yellowhammers were new for the break, as were mistle thrushes that sang and flew across with their characteristic bounding flight. Stonechat and linnet were the other heathland birds, plus the briefest of sounds heard by Anne and me that said that there was a tree pipit somewhere, but it remained hidden. Minotaur beetles, all dead, were an interesting find. Gail and Anne studied a moth that they later pinned down as common heath. Another moth we photographed was maiden's blush, for which the larval food plant is oak; the book notes that they often settle, like this one, on bracken. How nice to find a moth that has read the book!

A single lousewort was the showiest flower, and it's worth noting that *Pedicularis sylvatica* is scarce in Norfolk, especially compared with marsh lousewort (red rattle) that September's group saw here and at Holt Lowes. Other heathland specialists included sheep's sorrel, heath bedstraw and tormentil. We finished by walking over to the boggy area, dense with sphagnum moss but too wet to enter and too early for the botanical interest that will show later. At least two areas were protected by electric fences, presumably to keep out the ponies and cattle.



Lousewort; maiden's blush moth, both at Buxton Heath.

We drove onto Holt County Park, not to visit on this occasion but instead as a handy place for loos, picnic and a hot drink from Hetty's cabin. It was a very convivial picnic, accompanied by the usual tame robin, the sound of a nuthatch and the brief appearance of a marsh tit for George who was facing the right way.

It was a short journey onwards to Kelling Heath, arriving as rain set in. There was little choice: raincoats on and brollies put into action. There was a nice patch of hedgerow (or Pyrenean) cranesbill in the car



park. Once across the other side of the road, the four group members in the lead saw two woodlarks fly off the ground and away. While looking at a stonechat there was a movement behind: a red deer stag, then two more deer revealed themselves and we watched them watching us. It felt like a bonus from the heath being relatively undisturbed on account of the weather. We crossed the railway line, though our timing was out to see steam trains from the North Norfolk Railway: we heard two and saw the steam trail of one. We completed a brisk circuit of the main part of the heath next to the camping and caravan park, including a view down to the sea, though that took some imagination today. It wasn't a good day for botanising, though we did note heath milkwort and heath speedwell. We were just considering a plan B for the afternoon when the rain eased off, so that gave us time to dry while we completed another route. We didn't see much, and certainly no sign of the heath's Dartford warblers.

### Friday 21 May – Upton Marshes and Ranworth

Gail spent the morning at Thorpe Marshes before getting a train home around the middle of the day. For the rest of us, it was seriously windy this morning as we started our walk around the grazing marshes at NWT's Upton Marshes nature reserve. But it wasn't raining and perhaps not as cold as some expected, which were positives. In many ways it was the classic Broadland landscape that dominated, starting with the hire boats with wooden hulls in the reed-fringed Boat Dyke but especially the windmills at various points. The marshes themselves are at the heart of that landscape, traditionally managed with wide ditches and cattle grazing, plus open water in the form of lagoons to provide additional interest. A little egret was an early point of interest, then a small flock of starlings plus the inevitable herons and marsh harriers. As for waders, we had the full Broadland grazing marsh selection: lapwings, redshanks around the edge of a pool, avocets in the pool and oystercatchers.

It was more sheltered on the third side of the route, on the track between hedges after 'tall mill'. There was a Chinese water deer among the cattle, then another running on the other side, plus hares. The sun came out on the fourth and final leg, tempting out butterflies, namely a holly blue, lots of male orange tips and a confiding green-veined white that flitted from buttercup to buttercup, all alongside a meadow dominated by meadow foxtail grass.



Lichens in Ranworth's churchyard. On the left is the common sunburst lichen *Xanthoria parietina*; on the right is dusted yellow wall lichen *Caloplaca ruderum* which features in *Norfolk's Wonderful 150*.  
Photo taken 14 May 2021, the 20p to show scale.

We drove to Ranworth and with some time in hand before lunch, walked to the church. Thyme-leaved sandwort on the church wall was a reminder that walls can be an interesting habitat in their own right – and the same could be said for the natural history feature that I wanted to share. On one of the gravestones and on a church buttress, the latter especially on old mortar, is a recently discovered lichen that features in the book *Norfolk's Wonderful 150*. The lichen is tiny, as the photo shows; perhaps that

was why it was overlooked. There was also lots of meadow saxifrage and bulbous buttercup, encouraged by NWT's churchyard conservation scheme, then a patch of leopardsbane (a non-native) and a tulip tree around the back of the church.

By now it was raining, and we found shelter for eating picnics on benches under the overhang of the Broads Authority's information centre on the staithe by Malthouse Broad.

With rain continuing, albeit not too heavy, the best option was to take the short walk to NWT's floating information centre on the edge of Ranworth Broad. There is a huge oak on the dry land by the entrance, then a recently enhanced boardwalk goes through a short stretch of carr woodland; swamp without the alligators, as the sign says. Lots of marsh ferns and one magnificent unfurling royal fern were highlights in the carr before the short stretch of cut fen with marsh marigolds.

Lorna in the visitor centre was glad to have some visitors at last, even if hot drinks and shelter were among the draws for us. Out the window we watched common terns, great crested grebes and a swan with a single cygnet, the two birds either side of the floating barrier in place as part of a water improvement project. That barrier was also a useful fixing point for no less than three grebes' nests. A check on the white crucifer flowers in the fen outside revealed the purple stamens of large bittercress, otherwise similar to the pale lady's smock farther on in the carr.

We still had time, and improving weather, to walk alongside the Bure National Nature Reserve and around a circuit that goes by the back of South Walsham Broad. A pair of Egyptian geese had nine goslings and there was a large lapwing chick by a pool where we'd seen an adult lapwing have a go at a marsh harrier. Moving into the drier area there were more hares. We returned to the cars at the same time as Anne returned from spending more time overlooking the marshes.

That evening, Julie and I joined the group's last dinner at Oaklands Hotel, where we shared holiday highlights noted below.

### **Saturday 22 May – Potter Heigham marshes and Buckenham marshes**

Anne stayed another day, and we spent a decidedly cold morning, though happily largely dry, at Potter Heigham Marshes. The unseasonal weather had the effect of bringing in large numbers of aerial feeders to feed over the many areas of open water, swifts especially though also swallows and martins. We found four species of wildfowl not seen previously on the break: shoveler, pochard, wigeon and a barnacle goose, one of Norfolk's feral population for the last of these. Marsh harriers were an ever-present bird, we heard bearded tits and saw enough greylag geese to last a lifetime.

After a light lunch in the Flour & Bean we moved onto Buckenham Marshes, part of the RSPB's complex of nature reserves in the mid-Yare. There were more shovelers and, as at Potter Heigham, all four waders that are on the best grazing marsh reserves: lapwing, redshank, oystercatcher and avocet. Chinese water deer seemed to be everywhere, with nine counted in a scan of the eastern side and more to the west of the track. Could we find a peregrine? There was a peregrine-shaped dot on the very distant Cantley Beet Factory, but it was tricky to be sure. Then we found another, much closer, on one of the many gates out on the marshes. As we'd approached Buckenham, Anne had noticed some clary on a roadside and our first rabbits of the break. We stopped to look on the way back: a fine clump of wild clary, which is scarce in east Norfolk.

### **The best bits**

Holiday highlights collected on the final evening and by email.

Gail	orange tips, the sight & the story of the half-built swallow nest on the boat; the perfect sighting of the crane over the broads; maiden's blush moth; seeing a cuckoo; three enormous hares & a bonus one yesterday, cuddle with a sweet little dog at the heath. And the <i>Norfolk's Wonderful 150</i> book.
Sonia	lousewort, Chinese water deer and fawn.
Margaret	crane flying; hares; red deer, so still, one, then another, then another ...
George	live muntjac; hobbies at Hickling; app working out sticky mouse-ear; boat trip.
Anne	hobbies; swifts; common terns; bittern; red deer; hearing grasshopper warbler.
Chris	boat trip and cranes; all those hobbies; sharing experience with the 'Sonia app'.



Two highlights: Chinese water deer and fawn through the rain at Strumpshaw Fen (SJD); swallow nest on Ross's boat at Horsey.

### WILDLIFE LISTS

#### BIRDS H – heard

Great crested grebe  
Cormorant  
Bittern  
Little egret  
Great white egret  
Grey heron  
Mute swan  
Greylag goose  
Canada goose  
Barnacle goose  
Egyptian goose  
Shelduck  
Wigeon  
Gadwall  
Teal  
Mallard  
Shoveler  
Pochard  
Tufted duck  
Marsh harrier  
Sparrowhawk  
Buzzard  
Kestrel  
Hobby  
Red-legged partridge  
Pheasant  
Moorhen  
Coot  
Crane  
Oystercatcher

Avocet  
Lapwing  
Redshank  
Black-headed gull  
Lesser black-backed gull  
Herring gull  
Common tern  
Stock dove  
Woodpigeon  
Collared dove  
Cuckoo  
Swift  
Green woodpecker  
Great spotted woodpecker  
Woodlark  
Skylark  
Sand martin  
Swallow  
House martin  
Tree pipit H  
Pied wagtail  
Wren  
Duncock  
Robin  
Stonechat  
Blackbird  
Song thrush  
Mistle thrush  
Cetti's warbler H  
Grasshopper warbler H

Sedge warbler  
Reed warbler  
Garden warbler  
Blackcap  
Whitethroat  
Chiffchaff  
Willow warbler  
Goldcrest H  
Bearded tit H  
Long-tailed tit  
Marsh tit  
Coal tit  
Blue tit  
Great tit  
Nuthatch H  
Jay  
Magpie  
Jackdaw  
Rook  
Carrion crow  
Starling  
House sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Greenfinch  
Goldfinch  
Siskin H  
Linnet  
Bullfinch  
Reedbunting  
Yellowhammer

#### MAMMALS

Muntjac  
Chinese water deer  
Red deer  
Grey squirrel  
Brown hare  
Rabbit

#### REPTILE/AMPHIBIAN

Common lizard  
Common frog H

#### MOTHS

Common heath  
Maiden's blush

#### BUTTERFLIES

Green-veined white  
Orange tip  
Brimstone  
Holly blue  
Peacock  
Small tortoiseshell

#### DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES

Egg-laying scars of willow emerald damselfly  
Large red damselfly  
Common blue damselfly  
Azure damselfly  
Variable damselfly  
Hairy dragonfly  
Four-spotted chaser



## OTHER NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES

Alder fly  
St Mark's fly  
7-spot ladybird  
Harlequin ladybird  
Green tiger beetle  
Minotaur beetle  
Whirligig beetle  
Banded snail

## LICHENS

Dusted yellow wall lichen *Caloplaca ruderum*  
Sunburst lichen *Xanthoria parietina*

## GALLS (see also photos below)

*Taphrina betulina* fungus causing witch's broom  
Cigar gall on reed, fly *Lipara lucens*  
Alexanders rust fungus *Puccinia smyrnii*  
Robin's pincushion (on dog rose), gall wasp *Diplolepis rosae*.  
**On oak:** currant galls: gall wasp *Neuroterus quercusbaccarum*.  
Oak apple: gall wasp *Biorhiza pallida*



Alder fly, Thorpe Marshes.



Alexanders rust fungus *Puccinia smyrnii*, NWT Thorpe Marshes.



Left: cigar gall on reed, caused by a fly *Lipara lucens*. Centre: currant galls on oak made by the sexual generation of the gall wasp *Neuroterus quercusbaccarum*, both at Hickling. Then right, from September 2020, common spangle galls caused by the asexual generation of the same gall wasp.