



Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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North Norfolk break
12 – 15 October 2021

Participants

Helen & Malcolm Crowder
Cheryl & Tim Hunt
Sue & Peter Burge
Steph and David Bennett

plus:
Helen Young (15 October)
Julia Maynard (13 & 15 October)

Leaders

Rob Lucking, Chris Durdin (13 & 15 November)
Report and lists by Rob Lucking.



Pink-footed geese over Cley (DB).

The group stayed at Titchwell Manor www.titchwellmanor.com
Cover photos, and many others, by David Bennett.
Top: grey phalarope at RSPB Titchwell Marsh. Bottom: beach huts at Wells.
Other photo credits as noted in the report.



Group members at Holkham beach (CD).

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays always tries to put something into nature conservation where we visit, and a donation of £40 per person to the RSPB earmarked for Titchwell Marsh nature reserve was our way of contributing this time. With the addition of Gift Aid through the Honeyguide Charitable Trust, we were able to give £400 to the RSPB.

Daily diary

Tuesday 12 October – Snettisham and Ken Hill

We met at the entrance to Snettisham Caravan Park and drove through chalets to park up on the sea bank overlooking The Wash. Waders were already congregating with a large flock of oystercatchers on the mud and smaller groups of ringed plovers and dunlins on the near shore. Farther out was a large flock of knots: Les, one of the RSPB volunteers, told us that 94,000 were counted a few days earlier. However, they stubbornly refused to fly.

A single spoonbill looked incongruous as it stood out in mud. It flew closer to us showing its dark wing tips and pale pink bill, marking it out as a juvenile bird. Most of Norfolk's spoonbills have already moved south for the winter so we were lucky to see one. Several flocks of redwings flew over giving their thin 'seep' call – the first big flocks of the autumn. It later turned out that there was a significant passage over Norfolk that morning.

As we walked up the path we met up with Russell Leavett, former RSPB warden and Honeyguide leader. Russell joined us as we walked up to the southernmost hide overlooking the gravel pits. On route we enjoyed good views of a little stint feeding with a small group of dunlins giving us the opportunity to compare the difference in size. We also saw a poorly looking guillemot on the water, two juvenile gannets and three lingering Sandwich terns. Finally, the knot flock took to the wing and gave us a great display as they swirled over the mudflats with the flock constantly changing shape.

We reached the new Knot's Landing hide, which was only opened last year, and has been designed to be more flood resilient than the previous hide. It is also full of nifty features such as one-way glass, special low-level photography slots and tiered seating. The hide gives great views over the southernmost pit, and we watched two little grebes and a great crested grebe and another little stint feeding in front of the hide.

We continued around the loop path where we had brief views of a red kite and better views of a marsh harrier. Better still we found red hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia* still in flower at its only Norfolk site. A Honeyguide day group saw it a month ago and it was a relief that it was still flowering.

After a leisurely lunch, we moved a short distance to Ken Hill grazing marsh and Snettisham Coastal Park, part of the Ken Hill Estate which hosted Spring and Autumnwatch this year. The estate is in the process of 'rewilding' the less agriculturally productive land and has even introduced a pair of beavers into an enclosure.

We walked out along sea bank overlooking the Ken Hill marsh on the right and Snettisham Coastal Park on the left. Sue asked whether we were likely to hear Cetti's warbler and immediately one gave a quick burst of song – it must have been listening!



Oystercatcher (this one's at Titchwell) and long-tailed tit (DB).

A long-tailed tit perched obligingly on top of a hawthorn bush and the grazing marsh held a large mixed flock of geese – primarily greylags but with a few Canada geese and hybrids. A small group of six barnacle geese flew in and were probably of captive origin. A female stonechat perched on some brambles from which it frequently flew up to catch insects. Crossing from the inner sea bank to the outer sea bank, we walked back along the edge of The Wash. The tide was a long way out by now, but we did see two turnstones feeding along the top of the beach. A barn owl gave good views as it hunted over the rough grassland of the Coastal Park and a flock of newly arrived redwings fed on haws in a hawthorn bush.

Wednesday 13 October – Holkham

The group met at Lady Anne's Drive at Holkham, joined today by Chris and Honeyguider Julia Maynard. As we got ourselves sorted, we watched a distant marsh harrier, red kite and common buzzard. A great white egret feeding among the cattle was more obliging.

We walked through the pines into Holkham Bay. Several jays flew over; apparently the acorn crop is poor this year and many jays are on the move in search of food.

In the pines there was a mixed flock of small birds including blue and coal tits, goldcrest and treecreeper and several more jays flew over. Out on the saltmarsh were several redshanks, meadow pipits and skylarks.

On the strand line we found slipper limpets, 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.



Slipper limpets, centre, with razor and cockle shells. Dead guillemot, part of a wider 'wreck' of auks.

We also saw the sorry sight of two dead guillemots on the beach and several more close inshore on the sea along with a steady movement of gannets of all different ages from dark juvenile birds through to white adults.

We retraced our steps as the tide came in and walked along the back of the saltmarsh in search of a snow bunting which had been seen on previous days. Unfortunately, there was no snow bunting but a fly-over brambling was seen by a few.

As we collected our picnic lunches, we enjoyed good views of a curlew on the grazing marsh and as we ate lunch by the visitor centre we watched common darter and southern hawker dragonflies over the reeds.

After lunch, we walked down the track behind the pines towards the town of Wells. Birds were in short supply but the movement of jays continued (unless it was the same ones going around in circles!) and we came across several mixed flocks of small birds with blue, great and coal tits the most numerous. With a bit of patience and perseverance we also had good views of goldcrest and treecreeper.

With birds a bit thin on the ground we looked downwards for some fungi finding a nice group of lilac bonnets and some sulphur tuft.

Thursday 14 October – Wells and Cley

We started the day by the Lifeboat Station at Wells-next-the-Sea where some red-throated divers had been lingering for several weeks. As we walked out over the sands there was a guillemot in the Outer Harbour and a little egret on the water's edge. Small numbers of brent geese were feeding on the mudflats.

As we rounded the corner, we saw several cormorants feeding in the channel and finally our target species, a red-throated diver! The diver was feeding actively but eventually everyone got good views through the telescopes.

There was also a good selection of waders feeding out on the mud including sanderling, bar-tailed godwits and curlew. Bar- and black-tailed godwits are often confused but habitat is often a good indicator with bar-tailed godwits favouring intertidal areas and black-tailed godwits preferring freshwater pools and wet grassland.

We moved onto one of north Norfolk's newest sites – North Point Pools. This wetland has been created by a local farmer with support from Natural England on former arable land that was too wet to farm profitably.



Egyptian goose; wigeon (behind) with teal (DB)

The most numerous species was Egyptian goose with well over 100 present. Egyptian goose is an introduced species to the UK and north Norfolk is its stronghold, although it has now spread south and west. There were two paler headed birds present which are thought to be Egyptian goose x ruddy shelduck hybrids. In among the other wildfowl – primarily wigeons and teals – was a single ruff and several black-tailed godwits. Red kite and kestrel flew over.

We carried on west to Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Cley Marshes nature reserve for lunch. We then walked out to the central hides overlooking Pat's Pool and Simmond's Scrape where there was a good selection of waders and wildfowl. We saw our first snipe of the holiday, two avocets and a small flock of dunlins with their 'sewing machine' feeding style. We also had good views of black-tailed godwits in flight showing their white wing bars and black tails.



Dunlin (at Titchwell); black-tailed godwit, Cley (DB).

Retracing our steps, we walked out towards the sea along the East Bank. There were good numbers of wigeons and teals on the grazing marsh and 70 cormorants were loafing on a pool. As we approached the sea, a flock of around 30 linnets was feeding on the pioneer saltmarsh on Arnold's Marsh and we watched two little grebes feeding in one of the big ditches that runs through the reserve.

We scanned the sea from the top of the shingle beach and quickly picked up at least two red-throated divers feeding close inshore, a single great crested grebe and a flock of auks – mostly guillemots but a few much darker birds were probably razorbills, although it was difficult to tell in a choppy sea at distance. Gannets were also much in evidence with at least 10 foraging offshore and a group of six immature birds settling on the sea and causing momentary confusion!

On the drive back to Titchwell, some members of the group were lucky enough to see a little owl by the main road.

Friday 15 October – Titchwell

For our final day we were joined again by Chris and two fellow Honeyguiders, Helen Young and Julia Maynard. We met in the Titchwell Marsh RSPB car park on a glorious sunny day. We completed formalities at the new 'meet and greet' hut and walked onto the reserve.

A buzzard was perched distantly out on the grazing marsh and we heard Cetti's warbler singing from inside the reedbed. As we continued down the path a group of around a dozen bearded tits burst out of the reeds and three males perched obligingly on the top of the reed stems, giving good views through the telescopes. Chris saw a water rail as it broke cover and scurried across one of the new bunds created to divide the reedbed into water-tight compartments. The rest of us had to make do with hearing its squealing call.

Out on the saltmarsh we watched two curlews and a great white egret flew over our heads. We could hear the soft calls of golden plovers and there was a large flock of several hundred birds on the newly remodelled fresh marsh giving close views, with the morning sunlight showing off their gold and black spangled plumage to good effect. The fresh marsh also held a small group of avocets and a flock of dunlins gave excellent views as they fed close to the path.



Golden plovers, a small part of a very big flock at Titchwell Marsh (CD).

As we approached the beach, a house sparrow was in the coastal scrub. House sparrow is a rare bird at Titchwell and the small flock of six that has been present for some weeks has attracted a lot of attention from Titchwell regulars!

On the beach, we quickly located a single purple sandpiper thanks to a tip-off from a fellow birdwatcher and watched it as it slept sheltered behind a lump of concrete on the beach. On the tideline were sanderlings, knots, oystercatcher, ringed plover, turnstone and bar-tailed godwit.



Saltmarsh at Titchwell (CD); purple sandpiper at Titchwell beach (DB).

The tide wasn't far out enough to see the remains of the forest that would have formed part of a land-bridge to the continent during the last Ice Age but we did find a lump of preserved peat riddled with holes made more recently by the common piddock, a bivalve mollusc that can burrow into quite hard sediments using the hard teeth on the blunt edge of its shell. We found some empty piddock shells on the beach along with hornwrack – a marine Bryzoan – and *Nemetesia*, a marine branched hydroid.

By now lunch was calling so we went back to the visitor centre to purchase lunch from the small café. While we were eating, we were told of a grey phalarope that had just been found on the reserve. We walked back up the path and immediately found the grey phalarope 'spinning' in the fresh marsh. 'Spinning' is the name given to the way that phalaropes feed and it is thought that the spinning motion brings invertebrates up to the surface of the water where they can be picked off. An escapee Bahama pintail added interest.

After enjoying the phalarope, we explored the fen areas of Titchwell and found a few late willow emerald damselflies in willows on the edge of a sunny pool. The willow emerald is a recent colonist to the UK being first recorded in Suffolk in 2009. It is now quite widespread across Norfolk. Chris showed us some egg-laying scars on willow twigs made by the willow emeralds.

We then explored the new habitats created ten years ago when clay was excavated from the reserve and used to strengthen the sea walls at Titchwell. Patsy's Pool gave us our first pintail and coot of the trip and we heard another Cetti's warbler singing from the reeds.

We followed the seasonal 'Autumn Trail' to view the fresh marsh from the opposite side and to look over the tidal reedbed and salt marsh the east. There were shaggy inkcaps in the grass and a swollen creeping thistle caught Steph's eye: it was a gall caused by the fly *Urophora cardui*. Several grey seals were hauled out on the saltmarsh: it is suspected that a small number pup at Titchwell.

By now the day was drawing to a close and so we walked back to the car park to say our farewells.

Highlights

Helen	Red-throated diver at Wells and grey phalarope at Titchwell.
Malcolm	Knot flock at Snettisham, purple sandpiper and grey phalarope at Titchwell.
Sue & Peter	Great views of curlew.
David	The knot murmuration and having such a great view of the grey phalarope doing its thing.
Steph	Highlights were first time viewings: the ghostly-looking barn owl flying low over the field; the red-throated diver bobbing on and under the water; the manic grey phalarope swimming round and round and yet didn't seem dizzy.
Chris	'Sequential hermaphrodite' slipper limpets; purple sandpiper and grey phalarope at Titchwell.
Rob	Grey phalarope and bearded tits at Titchwell.



Bahama pintail, Titchwell; great white egret, Titchwell; little egret, Cley (DB).

Bird list

Red-throated diver	1 Wells Harbour 14/10; 2 Cley Beach 15/10
Great crested grebe	1 Snettisham 12/10; 1 Cley 14/10
Little grebe	2 at Cley on 14/10; 2 Titchwell 15/10
Gannet	2 Snettisham 12/10; steady passage at Holkham 13/10; ca 12 Cley Beach 14/10
Cormorant	Seen in small numbers at virtually all coastal sites visited. Largest count was around 70 at Cley on 14/10/
Little egret	Several at Snettisham on 12/10 on the mud and on the pits. Also seen at Holkham, Wells, Cley and Titchwell.
Great white egret	One at Holkham on 13/10 and one flying over Titchwell on 15/10.
Grey heron	Singles at Ken Hill, Snettisham on 12/10, Holkham 13/10, North Point, Wells and Cley 14/10 & Titchwell 15/10.
Spoonbill	One immature at Snettisham 12/10.
Mute swan	Small numbers at all wetland sites visited
Pink-footed goose	Skeins at Snettisham 12/10, Holkham 13/10, Wells 14/10.
Greylag goose	Seen at all wetland sites.
Canada goose	Several amongst greylags at Ken Hill, Snettisham 12/10.
Brent goose	Small group on the mudflats at Wells on 14/10 and around 50 on the Titchwell freshwater marsh on 15/10.
Barnacle goose	Six at Ken Hill, Snettisham 12/10.
Egyptian goose	Large flock at North Point Pools on 14/10 along with two Egyptian goose x ruddy shelduck hybrids
Shelduck	Large numbers on the mudflats at Snettisham on 12/10 and several at Cley 14/10 and Titchwell 15/10.
Wigeon	Large flocks at Snettisham 12/10, Holkham 13/10, Wells & Cley 14/10 and Titchwell 15/10.
Gadwall	Seen at all wetland sites.
Mallard	Seen at all wetland sites.
Pintail	3 at Titchwell 15/10
[Bahama pintail	1 at Titchwell 15/10]
Shoveler	Small numbers seen at all wetland sites.
Eider	Two in flight at Holkham 13/10.
Red kite	Singles at Snettisham on 12/10, Holkham 13/10 & North Point, Wells 14/10
Marsh harrier	Seen at all wetland sites visited.
Buzzard	Small numbers seen throughout.
Kestrel	One at North Point, Wells and one at Cley on 14/10.
Pheasant	Plentiful on farmland as we travelled between sites.
Moorhen	Several on the pits at Snettisham on 12/10
Coot	One on Patsy's Reedbed, Titchwell 15/10
Oystercatcher	Large flock at Snettisham on 12/10, smaller numbers on the beach at Holkham (13/10), Wells Harbour (14/10), Cley (14/10) and Titchwell (15/10).
Avocet	Two at Cley on 14/10 and 17 at Titchwell on 15/10.
Ringed plover	Small numbers at Snettisham (12/10) and Titchwell (15/10)
Golden plover	Large flock on the fresh marsh at Titchwell on 15/10
Grey plover	Small numbers at Snettisham 12/10, Wells Harbour 14/10, Cley 14/10 and Titchwell 15/10
Lapwing	Small numbers at Cley 14/10, Titchwell 15/10
Sanderling	Small numbers at Snettisham 12/10, Wells Harbour 14/10, Cley 14/10 and Titchwell 15/10
Dunlin	Many on the Wash at Snettisham 12/10, Cley 14/10 and Titchwell 15/10
Little stint	3 or 4 at Snettisham 12/10
Redshank	Seen and heard at Holkham on 18/05, Cley on 19/05, Wells Harbour, North Point Pools & Stiffkey Fen on 20/05
Black-tailed godwit	Several at North Point, Wells and Cley 14/10 and at Titchwell 15/10
Bar-tailed godwit	Several at Snettisham 12/10, Wells Harbour 14/10 and Titchwell beach 15/10
Curlew	Many at Snettisham 12/10, Holkham 13/10, Wells Harbour and Cley 14/10 & Titchwell 15/10
Snipe	2 Cley 14/10
Turnstone	Snettisham 12/10, Titchwell 15/10
Grey Phalarope	One at Titchwell 15/10
Ruff	1 at North Point, Wells and several at Cley 14/10, one at Titchwell 15/10
Black-headed gull	Seen at all wetland sites visited.
Common gull	One at Wells Harbour 14/10, several at Titchwell on 15/10
Lesser black-backed gull	Several at Cley 14/10.
Herring gull	Seen at all coastal sites visited
Great black-backed gull	One in Wells Harbour, 14/10
Guillemot	One at Snettisham 12/10; two dead birds at Holkham with many more offshore 13/10; one in Wells Harbour 14/10 and several large flocks at sea at Cley.
Razorbill	Several darker-looking auks with the flock at Cley on 14/10 were probably Razorbills
Woodpigeon	Common throughout.
Skylark	Seen in small numbers throughout – several in the salt marsh at Holkham 13/10.
Meadow pipit	Seen in small numbers throughout – several in the salt marsh at Holkham 13/10.
Pied wagtail	Small numbers seen throughout.

Wren	Several at Holkham 13/10
Dunnock	Several at Ken Hill, Snettisham 12/10 and at Holkham 13/10
Robin	Several at Holkham 13/10
Blackbird	Seen or heard most days in suitable habitat
Redwing	At least three large flocks went over at Snettisham on 12/10 plus small flock in bushes at Ken Hill.
Cetti's warbler	Heard singing at Ken Hill, Snettisham 12/10, Cley 14/10 & Titchwell 15/10
Goldcrest	Several at Holkham on 13/10
Chiffchaff	One at Holkham 13/10
Long-tailed tit	Several at Ken Hill, Snettisham 12/10 and Holkham 13/10
Coal tit	Several at Holkham 13/10
Blue tit	Seen/heard in most woodland habitats
Great tit	Seen/heard in most woodland habitats
Treecreeper	2 Holkham 13/10
Jay	Small numbers moving through constantly at Holkham on 13/10
Magpie	Seen most days
Jackdaw	Several at Ken Hill, Snettisham on 12/10; at Holkham 13/10 and Cley 15/10. Probably overlooked at other sites
Starling	Several small flocks at Snettisham 13/10. Probably overlooked at other sites.
House sparrow	One at Titchwell on 15/10 - a site rarity!
Chaffinch	Heard at Holkham on 13/10
Greenfinch	1 Ken Hill, Snettisham 12/10
Brambling	One flew over at Holkham on 13/10
Goldfinch	Seen or heard most days in suitable habitat
Linnet	Around 30 on Arnold's Marsh, Cley 14/10

Mammal

Grey seal	Several hauled out on the saltmarsh at Titchwell on 15/10
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Fungi at Holkham: amethyst deceiver, hare's ear, lilac bonnet (CD).



Gall on creeping thistle caused by the fly *Urophora cardui* (CD); grey seal on saltmarsh at Titchwell (DB).