

# Honeyguide

## WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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North Norfolk break  
10 – 14 October 2023

**Participants**

Simon Jones  
Anne McGregor

**Plus:**

Helen Young (12 & 13 October)  
Chris & Julie Durdin (12 October)

**Leader**

Rob Lucking  
Report and lists by Rob Lucking.



Curlew in Wells Harbour (CD).

The group stayed at Titchwell Manor [www.titchwellmanor.com](http://www.titchwellmanor.com)

Cover photos: Wells Harbour, and brent geese at Wells (CD).  
Other photos by Rob Lucking and Chris Durdin.



Common frog near Wells North Point wetland (CD).

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays always tries to put something into nature conservation where we visit, on this occasion a donation of £40 per person to Norfolk Wildlife Trust. With the addition of Gift Aid through the Honeyguide Charitable Trust, we were able to give £100 to NWT.



## DAILY DIARY

**Monday 9 October** – arrival at Titchwell Manor for the group members staying over.

**Tuesday 10 October – Holkham NNR**

It was an unseasonably warm and sunny day when we arrived at Holkham National Nature Reserve. Pink-footed geese were flying over, and we saw an unusually pale buzzard perched in the trees on the edge of the grazing marsh.

As it was such a nice day we decided to take lunch with us to eat in the field and set out along the path running westwards behind the pinewoods. Jays were plentiful and we watched two mistle thrushes in a dead tree beside the path. A fungus by the path was, according to the ObsIdentify app and later checked in reference books, *Gymnopilus junonius* or Spectacular rustgill.



Spectacular rustgill. *Gymnopilus junonius*; ant-lion larval pit (RL).

We paused to watch a mixed feeding flock pass through. It was mostly members of the tit family with long-tailed, blue, great and coal tits all noted. A chiffchaff sang briefly and we watched a treecreeper feeding in one of the pine trees.

Common darter dragonflies were common, and we also saw a single willow emerald on a reed stem.

We reached a pond known locally as 'Salt's Hole'. It is actually an isolated saline pool and a remnant of the saltmarsh creeks that existed before the Coke family drained and embanked what is now freshwater grazing marsh. It is a very reliable spot for little grebes – and we were rewarded with good views of two - and other wildfowl which today included wigeon, mallard and gadwall.

The elevated Washington Hide gave us good views over the grazing marsh and a great egret was feeding in the pool in front of the hide. A little more distant was another great egret and two cattle egrets feeding amongst the livestock. Two other birders in the hide told us that a white-tailed eagle had been seen earlier and we had two very brief views of it in flight. More obliging were multiple red kites, buzzards and a superb peregrine.

We could have stayed in the hide for hours, but lunch beckoned and we were planning to picnic in the dunes to the west of the pinewoods. We had a quick look at the ant lion pits in the cart shed opposite Meals House and had great views of a female great spotted woodpecker – the females have a black and white head while males have a red patch on the nape.

We reached the dunes and as soon as we had made ourselves comfortable, we spotted the white-tailed eagle perched in a dead tree. Over the course of the next half an hour we watched it fly down into a pool, presumably to feed, and then flap across the marsh to perch up on a fence post. Rob subsequently found out that it is an immature female from the Isle of Wight re-introduction scheme. Many of the Isle of Wight birds have made their way to Norfolk – they must like it here!

After we'd eaten, we walked out through Burnham Overy dunes. Meadow pipits were very evident with several small flocks seen along with a flock of 20+ goldfinches. We had frustratingly brief glimpses of a male ring ouzel in flight over the dunes but try as we may, we couldn't relocate it. Two stonechats were more obliging though.

We started our walk back to Lady Anne's Drive. A yellow-browed warbler called from a clump of willows but proved very elusive giving only brief glimpses. We made it back to the cafe in time for a much-appreciated cup of tea having enjoyed some excellent birds and even better weather!



White-tailed eagle (RL).

### **Wednesday 11 October – Cley**

The weather forecast was for heavy rain all day and so it was a pleasant surprise when we parked up at Cley to find that it was dry! To make the most of the conditions we chose to walk to the East Bank via the Bishop Hide before lunch and save the central hides until the afternoon when the rain might arrive.

Upon entering Bishop Hide, we soon found our target bird – the long-billed dowitcher that has been at Cley for the past year. Unfortunately, it was fast asleep among a group of black-tailed godwits but there were plenty of other birds to look at including two very close female pintail, a group of around 40 dunlins, a dozen or so avocets and a single pink-footed goose. A late swallow was clearly finding plenty of insects just outside the hide.

Heading out along the East Bank we saw a very smart juvenile ruff and a flock of wigeons grazed on the marshes. From the shelter looking out over Arnold's Marsh we saw our first greenshank and grey plover among the redshanks. Two red kites hunted over the shingle bank. By the time we made it to the beach the wind had picked up but there was plenty of activity on the beach. Several small groups of razorbills were feeding just off the beach and a Manx shearwater passed by close inshore. There was a steady easterly passage of gannets, mainly juveniles, and two red-throated divers gave excellent close views.

We headed back towards the visitor centre for lunch but popped into Bishop Hide again to see whether the dowitcher had woken up. It had but was more distant. Nevertheless, we had good views of it feeding with two snipe.

We enjoyed a leisurely lunch as the forecast rain came in but fortunately it had eased enough by the time we had finished eating for us to head out to the central hides. We added a few species to the list including both lesser and great black-backed gulls, coot and ringed plover but as the rain came in again we called it a day.

### **Thursday 12 October – Well and Stiffkey**

We were joined today by Chris & Julie Durdin and local Honeyguider, Helen Young. We met up in the town of Wells-next-the-Sea where it was distinctly cooler than previous days.



Down on the quay we saw our first brent geese, including some young birds with white tips to their wing coverts giving the effect of white barring on the back. A curlew gave good views as it fed along the edge of a saltmarsh creek along with two oystercatchers. By the fisherman's huts we saw our first house sparrows.



Oystercatcher (RL); common toadflax (CD).

After a short walk along the sea bank we arrived at the first of the North Point pools, a set of pools created around five years ago on former arable farmland which was too wet to farm productively. The pool held mostly greylag geese but among them were two barnacle geese from the resident naturalised population. The scrub held several goldfinches, greenfinch, song thrush and reed buntings.

Water levels in the main pools were quite high meaning limited mud for wading birds but good for the large number of ducks. We saw several pintails, including a couple of smart drakes, with many teals and wigeons. Two ruffs and a black-tailed godwit were on the far side of the pool but unfortunately no sign of the pectoral sandpiper that had been seen on and off for the past couple of weeks.

There were two galls this morning. The first were yellow-coloured spots on alexanders leaves caused by a rust fungus *Puccinia smyrnii*, the second Robin's pincushion on dog rose caused by the larvae of a tiny gall wasp, *Dipoloepis rosae*.



Ivy bee on hogweed, Wells (CD).

After lunch back in Wells, we returned to the cars in Polka Road. Here, on a hogweed flower, a male ivy bee was feeding. Chris writes: an ivy bee on hogweed interested me as I have only seen ivy bees feeding on ivy flowers (though also around where they nest underground in sandy soil). The timing was end-of-season when ivy has fewer flowers, which may be a factor. In '*The Bees of Norfolk*' book by Nick Owens, feeding on ivy,

prickly sow-thistle and ragwort are mentioned, but not hogweed. The book is dated 2017 when ivy bees had just arrived in Norfolk, and now they are ubiquitous, so more records on different flowers are to be expected. Nonetheless I reported this sighting to Tim Strudwick, Honeyguide leader and Norfolk recorder for bumblebees, solitary bees and wasps.

Tim says: "Yes, certainly a male ivy bee as the thorax is too ginger for any alternatives. There are now records from a large variety of flowers, mostly daisy family but in Norfolk also Calluna, Reseda, Scabious, Clematis, mint and chives, but not hogweed as far as I can see."

Helen headed home to walk her dogs and we travelled a short distance along the coast to Stiffkey Fen. Along the way we photographed common puffballs, identified back at Titchwell Manor: 'Creamy-white conical warts' in the early stages – they drop off later, says the guide – is a good feature. The fen held a similar selection of waterfowl as North Point but with the addition of two greenshanks. We enjoyed good views of a brown hare on a nearby stubble field, and there were three when we returned along here later.



Common puffballs, Stiffkey (CD). Sulphur tuft, Titchwell (RL).

We continued along the path to overlook Blakeney Harbour where the tide was coming in quickly. We saw a small group of grey seals on a distant sand bank and in the channel at least four red-throated divers, a great crested grebe and several razorbills. Three Sandwich terns perched on one of the navigation buoys.

As we headed back to the cars, the number of greenshanks on the fen had risen to eight and we could hear them calling to each other.

#### **Friday 13 October – Titchwell and Holme**

The weather forecast wasn't promising for today and it was distinctly cooler and breezier when we arrived at Titchwell in the morning. Definitely a day for waterproofs!

We headed from the car park towards the visitor centre, hearing a goldcrest calling. A clump of fungi on a dead log was identified as sulphur tuft. Unfortunately, due to a rat problem, the bird feeders – which often attract bramblings at this time of year – were empty.

We walked out along the west bank path where we saw several marsh harriers battling against the stiff breeze, a little egret out on the saltmarsh and several curlew and redshank. As the Island Hide was closed for refurbishment, we pushed on to Parrinder Hide so get out of the wind.

The water levels were quite high on the fresh marsh but on the closest island to us was a small group of dunlins, ringed plover and an adult little stint. These were joined by a male ruff with a very white head. A large flock of greylag geese flew in and we were able to find a single Russian white-fronted goose among them.

We attempted to walk up to the beach, pausing to have a look at a spectacular wasp spider on the sea bank. A heavy squall came through and sent us scurrying back to Parrinder Hide! As we dried off the rain eventually passed through so Simon and Rob made a break for the beach while Anne and Helen remained in the hide.

The sea was quiet and we only added red-breasted merganser to the holiday list. Similarly, there were very few waders on the beach - just a few bar-tailed godwits, turnstone, grey plover and sanderling.





Little stint; Russian white-fronted goose with greylags (RL).

We headed back towards the visitor centre for lunch, picking up Anne and Helen on the way who had managed to see 2-3 bearded tits from the hide.

We said goodbye to Helen after lunch before setting off to explore the Fen and Meadow Trails. Just beyond the Fen Hide we heard a yellow-browed warbler call but despite searching through the tit flock we couldn't pick it out.

As the weather was starting to close in again and we'd pretty much exhausted our options at Titchwell we decided to drive the short distance to Holme to explore a little visited area, and one Honeyguide groups hadn't been to before, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Holme Marsh reserve which is owned by the Courtyard Farm Trust and managed by NWT.

We parked up in Holme village and spent some time in the two hides overlooking a reed-fringed pool within a larger area of grazing marsh. Little grebes and coot foraged in the pool and we heard a tawny owl call a few times – the weather was so dreary it must have thought it was dusk! At least three marsh harriers foraged over the grazing marsh and we heard a water rail squealing from the reeds; Anne was sitting in the right spot and managed to glimpse it.

We were joined by another birdwatcher and while Simon and Rob were talking about optics, Anne was lucky enough to see a bittern fly into the pool! We waited a while to see if it would reappear but no such luck. By now, the rain had set in good and proper and it was time to call it a day.

## WILDLIFE LISTS

### BIRDS

**Red-throated diver:** Several on the sea at Cley 11/10, at least 4 in Blakeney Harbour 12/10

**Great crested grebe:** 1 in Blakeney Harbour 12/10

**Little grebe:** 2 on Salts Hole, Holkham 10/10; two at Cley 11/10; 1 Stiffkey Fen 12/10; 1 Titchwell & 1 Holme Marsh 13/10

**Manx shearwater:** One close inshore at Cley 11/10

**Gannet:** Steady easterly passage, mostly juveniles, at Cley 11/10

**Cormorant:** Several flying over Holkham grazing marsh at dusk 10/10; on sea at Cley 11/10; Wells Harbour and Blakeney Harbour 12/10

**Bittern:** 1 Holme Marsh 13/10

**Cattle egret:** 2 Holkham 10/10

**Little egret:** 2 at Cley 11/10; on the saltmarsh at Wells and Stiffkey 12/10; several at Titchwell & Holme Marsh 13/10

**Great white egret:** 2 Holkham 10/10

**Grey heron:** Several Holkham 10/10; 1 on saltmarsh at Wells 12/10; 1 Holme Marsh 13/10

**Mute swan:** Several Holkham 10/10, at Cley 11/10, North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 12/10

**Pink-footed goose:** Large flocks on grazing marsh Holkham 10/10; one on Pat's Pool at Cley and small flock on field by visitor centre 11/10; flying over Wells 12/10

**Russian white-fronted goose:** One with greylags at Titchwell 13/10

**Greylag goose:** Seen at all wetland sites visited

**Canada goose:** 2 at Cley 11/10, along with a greylag/Canada goose hybrid

**Barnacle goose:** 2 North Point, Wells 12/10

**Brent goose:** Several hundred in Wells Harbour 12/10

**Egyptian goose:** Several Holkham 10/10; at North Point, Wells 12/10

**Shelduck:** Several at Holkham 10/10, at Cley 11/10; Wells Harbour, Stiffkey Fen and Blakeney Harbour 12/10

**Wigeon:** Good numbers at Holkham 10/10; Cley 11/10; North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 12/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Gadwall:** Seen on Salt's Hole at Holkham 10/10; Cley 11/10; North Point, Wells 12/10; Titchwell & Holme Marsh 13/10

**Mallard:** Seen at all wetland sites visited

**Pintail:** Several females at Cley 11/10; North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 12/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Shoveler:** Several at Holkham 10/10; at Cley 11/10; North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 12/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Red-breasted merganser:** 1 Titchwell 13/10

**Marsh harrier:** Several at Holkham 10/10; at Cley 11/10; several at Titchwell and Holme Marsh 13/10

**White-tailed eagle:** Immature female from the Isle of Wight reintroduction project at Holkham 10/10

**Red kite:** Seen throughout the day at Holkham 10/10; 2 Cley 11/10, 2 Wells Harbour 12/10

**Buzzard:** Several at Holkham 10/10 including one very pale individual, over Wells town 12/10

**Sparrowhawk:** 2 Holkham 10/10

**Kestrel:** Several Holkham 10/10; 2 Cley 11/10; North Point, Wells 12/10; Titchwell and Holme Marsh 13/10

**Peregrine:** 1 Holkham 10/10

**Red-legged partridge:** Several seen alongside roadsides

**Pheasant:** Seen every day

**Water rail:** Heard at Titchwell, heard and seen Holme Marsh 13/10

**Moorhen:** Several at Cley 11/10; Stiffkey Fen 12/10; Titchwell & Holme Marsh 13/10

**Coot:** 1 Cley 11/10; several at Titchwell & Holme Marsh 13/10

**Oystercatcher:** Wells Harbour & Blakeney Harbour 12/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Avocet:** Several at Cley 11/10; 12 at Titchwell 13/10

**Ringed plover:** 6 Cley 11/10, 2 Wells 12/10, 3 Titchwell 13/10

**Golden plover:** c.450 Wells Harbour 12/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Grey plover:** One on Arnold's Marsh, Cley 11/10; 1 Wells Harbour & several in Blakeney Harbour 12/10; several on beach at Titchwell 13/10

**Lapwing:** Seen at Holkham 10/10; Cley 11/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Sanderling:** Several on beach at Titchwell 13/10

**Dunlin:** Flock of around 50 on Pat's Pool at Cley 11/10

**Little stint:** 1 Titchwell 13/10

**Ruff:** At least 4 at Cley 11/10; 2-3 North Point, Wells 12/10

**Snipe:** Several at Cley 11/10

**Black-tailed godwit:** Good numbers at Cley 11/10; several at North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 12/10

**Bar-tailed godwit:** Several in Blakeney Harbour 12/10

**Curlew:** Seen on the grazing marsh at Holkham 10/10; around 10 at Cley 11/10; Wells Harbour 12/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Redshank:** Several at Cley 11/10, Wells Harbour & Blakeney Harbour 12/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Greenshank:** 1 Cley 11/10; 8 Stiffkey Fen, 12/10

**Turnstone:** One seen flying along beach at Cley 11/10; 3 Wells Harbour 12/10; on beach at Titchwell 13/10

**Long-billed dowitcher:** One at Cley 11/10

**Black-headed gull:** Seen throughout

**Common gull:** Several at sea at Cley 11/10; Wells Harbour & Blakeney Harbour 12/10; Titchwell 13/10

**Lesser black-backed gull:** Three at Cley 11/10; 4 Titchwell 13/10

**Herring gull:** Several at Cley 11/10; lots in Blakeney Harbour 12/10 and at Titchwell 13/10

**Great black-backed gull:** Two adults at Cley 11/10; Wells Harbour and many in Blakeney Harbour 12/10; several at Titchwell 13/10

**Sandwich tern:** Three Blakeney Harbour 12/10

**Razorbill:** Around 50 on the sea at Cley 11/10; 4+ Blakeney Harbour 12/10

**Woodpigeon:** Common throughout.

**Tawny owl:** One called briefly at Holme Marsh 13/10

**Kingfisher:** Heard at Titchwell 13/10

**Great spotted woodpecker:** 1 at Holkham 10/10

**Skylark:** Seen in small numbers throughout.

**Meadow pipit:** Several small flocks in Burnham Overy Dunes 10/10; several North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 12/10; also at Titchwell 13/10

**Pied wagtail:** Small numbers seen throughout.

**Wren:** Seen or heard most days

**Duncock:** Seen or heard most days



**Robin:** Seen or heard most days

**Stonechat:** 2 Burnham Overy Dunes 10/10; 2 Wells Harbour & 1 Stiffkey Fen 12/10

**Blackbird:** Seen or heard most days in suitable habitat

**Ring ouzel:** One in flight briefly at Burnham Overy Dunes 10/10

**Mistle thrush:** 2 Holkham 10/10

**Song thrush:** North Point, Wells 12/10

**Cetti's warbler:** Heard singing at Holkham, Cley, North Point, Wells and Titchwell.

**Chiffchaff:** One singing at Holkham 10/10

**Yellow-browed warbler:** One calling and seen very briefly at Holkham 10/10; one heard calling at Titchwell 13/10

**Goldcrest:** Several seen & heard at Holkham 10/10; heard at Stiffkey 12/10 & Titchwell 13/10

**Bearded tit:** 2 briefly at Cley 11/10; 2-3 Titchwell 13/10

**Long-tailed tit:** Several feeding flocks at Holkham 10/10; Stiffkey Fen 12/10

**Coal tit:** Several at Holkham 10/10

**Blue tit:** Seen/heard in most woodland habitats

**Great tit:** Seen/heard in most woodland habitats

**Treecreeper:** 1 at Holkham 10/10

**Jay:** Small numbers moving through constantly at Holkham on 10/10; 1 Titchwell 13/10

**Magpie:** Seen throughout

**Jackdaw:** Seen throughout

**Rook:** Quite a few at Cley 11/10

**Carrion crow:** Seen most days

**Starling:** Several in the grazing marsh at Holkham 10/10, at Cley 11/10 and Titchwell 13/10. Probably overlooked at other sites.

**House sparrow:** Several in Wells 12/10

**Chaffinch:** Several at Titchwell 13/10. Probably overlooked at other sites

**Greenfinch:** North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 12/10

**Goldfinch:** Flock of 20+ in dunes at Holkham 10/10; several at North Point, Wells 12/10

**Siskin:** Heard Holkham 10/10

**Linnet:** Small flock in the dunes at Holkham 10/10, over Wells Harbour area 12/10 and around 30 at Cley 11/10

**Reed bunting:** Cley 11/10, North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 12/10

## **MAMMALS**

**Grey seal:** hauled out on sand banks off Blakeney Point.

**Muntjac:** one on the fresh marsh at Titchwell, one at North Point, Wells.

**Brown hare:** one at Wells, three on fields by Stiffkey Fen.

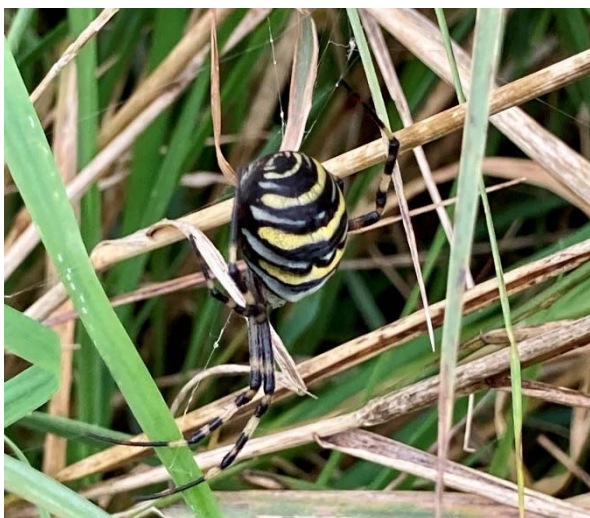
**Brown rat:** one at Wells.

## **NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES**

Willow emerald (Western willow spreadwing) – Holkham 10/10

Ivy bee – Wells, 12/10

Wasp spider – Titchwell, 13/10



Wasp spider (female), little egret (RL).