

WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

Bird-watching Holiday

TO

NORTHUMBERLAND

WITH

**CENTRAL LONDON RSPB MEMBERS'
GROUP**

TRIP REPORT

JUNE 23RD – JUNE 26TH 2017

DAY 1 – FRIDAY 23RD JUNE 2017 & PRE TOUR SIGHTINGS WED 21ST & THURS 22ND JUNE

PRE-TOUR SIGHTINGS

I collected a minibus locally in Yeovil on Wednesday morning and together with Nigel Bleaken we drove it to Northumberland being on the road for most of the day. We arrived in Seahouses at 7pm where we checked into our B&Bs, we had time for a short walk to the harbour where we saw many Eider Duck, Rock Pipit, Herring, Lesser Black-backed & Greater Black-backed Gulls.

We spent the whole day of Thurs 22ND driving to various sites making a recce tour of the area, we visited Holy Island, Harthope Valley, Amble, Hauxley and several other places in between.



A good selection of birds were seen including: Goosander, Common Scoter, Puffin, Reed Bunting, Common Sandpiper, Yellowhammer, Lesser Redpoll, Common Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Grey Wagtail and many more.

We also stopped off at a site near Preswick Airport on the way to Newcastle, a protected area called Preswick Carr. It was very windy there so we never stopped long but we did see Willow/Marsh Tit, Grey Partridge and an extraordinary sighting of a Common Snipe balancing on a telegraph wire!

Another stop at a place called Big Water produced sightings of Common Tern, Great Crested and Little Grebes, Moorhens, Coots, Mute Swan and Grey Heron.

GROUP ARRIVAL AT NEWCASTLE CENTRAL – TRANSFER TO BEADNELL – BIRDING AT SEAHOUSES AND LOW NEWTON

WEATHER: Dull overcast with rain, brighter and dry later

This 3 night – 4 day tour started off very smoothly, the group arrived from London on time at Newcastle Central Railway Station. Nigel and I met them on arrival at 13:45, we quickly loaded up the

bus and we were out of Newcastle city centre in about 10 minutes. We drove northward for 50 minutes through rain showers but it began to clear up as we approached our hotel in Beadnell.

We noted Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Wood Pigeon, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow and Herring Gull along the route. By 3:30pm we were all checked in and back in the bus raring to go. We drove 2 miles to Seahouses and parked in the harbour area which was busy with tourists. On the quay-side we met up with the local Common Eider Ducks, they were very tame and came very close. Many little chicks gathered around too, one or two males, showing eclipse plumage, sat a little further out.



The weather improved all the time and the sun came out highlighting the lovely colours of the coastal rocks, the cliffs and the sea. We could see the Farne Islands just offshore, the sea itself was alive with birds, as far as your eyes could see thousands were dashing about. Apart from the four common gull species, we also saw within a few minutes, the following list: Great Cormorant, European Shag, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Northern Gannet, Oystercatcher, Ruddy Turnstone, Redshank, Red Knot and many terns flying off-shore.

We walked out of Seahouses along the low cliffs towards the Golf Course where a large Kittiwake colony can easily be viewed from the footpath. Hundreds of these beautiful little gulls dashed about we could see that many were feeding young, a few pairs of Fulmar were also breeding there. All along the cliff small groups of Sand Martins had developed a string of nesting sites, they too were busy feeding young.

In the fields behind us we saw lots of Meadow Pipits, also Skylarks, Stonechats, Common Starlings and a few Linnets. We scanned further out to sea and we were amazed at the large numbers of birds present, it was like Piccadilly Circus during rush hour! We added Sandwich Tern, Manx Shearwater and Razorbill to the list before we walked back into town to catch our bus which Nigel had driven round to collect us.

For the last hour we visited Low Newton which is a tiny hamlet a little further south along the coast from Beadnell, there are two pools there, one was a seasonal flooded meadow, the other a fresh-water pool, a Great White Egret turned up there this morning which is an extremely rare bird for the area. We didn't have time to walk to the pools but we could scope them from our high position at the car park.

We added Grey Heron and Lapwing to our list but the Egret could not be seen. The car park provided some interesting wildlife watching, we saw a large Hedgehog, also Common Moorhen, Yellowhammer, Tree Sparrow, Common Whitethroat, Linnet, Goldfinch and we heard both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff.

Dinner was taken back at the hotel at 7:30pm, it was a joyous affair with lots of lively banter, the food was good with huge portions, oh dear, waistline! The sunset around 9:30pm was a very colourful affair, Nigel and I walked down to Beadnell Harbour before turning in for the night. We saw 50 species during those 3-4 hours today, an excellent start.

DAY 2 - SATURDAY 24TH JUNE 2017

HOLY ISLAND (LINDISFARNE) – COQUET ISLAND CRUISE – HAUXLEY NATURE RESERVE

WEATHER: Very windy all day, broken sunshine. Temp around 17C

Our morning trip to Holy Island was much anticipated by the group, however, as far as birding was concerned it turned out a disappointment because of the wind. Blustery gales almost blew us over at times and you couldn't keep your scope still when viewing.



We arrived at 9:30am and parked up, Holy Island is reached by a metalled road that becomes submerged during high tide so you have a limited time on the island. We walked down through the village, passed the ruins of the ancient Priory and up on the bank to view the channel between the island and the mainland. We found a dozen or so Goosanders loafing on the rocks, also Oystercatchers, some of the common gulls and a huge group of Grey Seals lying on a sand-bar.

In the little harbour we found some shelter from the wind, we saw Greater Ringed Plover, Rock Pipit, a few Sandwich Terns and not much else. We walked around to Lindisfarne Castle which was closed for repair and covered in scaffold and white sheeting, such a shame.

The pathway led us around the coastal edge of the island and whilst we tried hard to sea-watch it was very hard to find shelter from the wind. We watched many Arctic Terns, Northern Gannets, Eider Ducks, Ruddy Turnstones and more Oystercatchers. In the grass meadows there were many Meadow Pipits and Skylarks, they were dashing about but we saw little else out there.

A small lagoon near the visitor's centre held about 20 Northern Lapwing and a single Dunlin and several Redshank. We ate our picnic lunch in the village whilst sitting on park benches before getting back onto the bus to drive off the island.

We left Holy Island at 1pm and spent the next hour driving down to Amble Harbour where we were to meet our 'Puffin Tour Cruise' around Coquet Island. It was still windy but the sailing went ahead and to our great surprise and delight the off-shore westerly wind did not affect the sea condition at all.



We had a great trip, the ride was smooth and wind was hardly noticeable at all. The birding was amazing, thousands and thousands of birds filled the sky and the water all times. We had good close views of Grey Seals too. The boat drifted close the shore-line of the island but for obvious reasons we were not allowed to land there.

The island is famous for its Puffin colony but there are also Arctic and Sandwich Terns, also around 90 pairs of the rarer Roseate Terns. We got close enough to pick out the rosy breasts of the Roseate Terns as they perched on the shore, fantastic! Other breeding species included: Puffin, Kittiwake, Fulmar, lots of gulls and a few Guillemots. The trip lasted just one hour and was over before you knew it, what a great experience. We saw a huge Sand Martin colony as we came back to the harbour as well as Cormorants and Shags.

Back on terra firma we got back on the bus and drove for 10 minutes round to the Hauxley Wildlife Trust Reserve. This splendid reserve has just re-opened after a long closure due to a fire destroying the main centre. You can view a fresh water lagoon from several hides as well as the visitor's centre, it was packed with birds, unfortunately we had only 1 hour to enjoy the birds as the reserve closes at 5pm!

We saw many species there and an added bonus was that the high tide had brought in lots of waders, we had great views of both Black and Bar-tailed Godwits, Redshank, Curlew, Ruddy Turnstone and a

single Common Sandpiper. Dozens of Canada and Greylag Geese were joined by Common Shelduck, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Mallard and a few Little Grebes out on the water.

Before we left we found a nice bird for the list in the shape of a Little Gull, it even looked tiny amongst the Black-headed Gull chicks that lined the shore of an island. We had a tremendously enjoyable hour in the reserve, the staff were really friendly and helpful a smashing place to visit and to top it all we found many orchids in the grass verges and a Red Squirrel feeding on nuts at the 'bird feeding station' in the car park.



We were back at the hotel at 6pm, dinner was lovely, again there was too much food, but we enjoyed it.

DAY 3 – SUNDAY 25TH JUNE 2017

LOW NEWTON RSPB RESERVE – FARNE ISLES

WEATHER: broken sunshine, still windy easing off later. Temp around 18C

Today was to be the highlight of the whole trip and the main reason for coming – a visit to the Farne Islands. We had booked an all-day trip which included a boat trip around all the islands and a two hour visit on Staple Island and another 2 hour stop on Inner Farne.

However, the windy conditions made changes to all of our plans; instead of sailing at 9:30am for the original tour we were told to come back at 11:30am for a modified tour which excluded the 2 hour visit to Staple Island. So, we had two hours to kill which we promptly filled by making a return visit to the RSPB Reserve at Low Newton.

From the car park at Low Newton we saw Common Whitethroat, Greenfinch, Meadow Pipit and we heard Yellowhammer. A quick scan of the bay produced Eider Duck, Oystercatcher, Northern Gannet and a few Cormorants.

On the way to the RSPB hide which overlooks a fresh water lagoon we passed a small flooded meadow which held several species, mainly gulls, Black-headed, Herring Gulls and our first Common Gull. We also saw Lapwing, Common Shelduck and a male Eurasian Teal. In the bushes around the footpath we saw Reed Bunting, Linnet and Common Whitethroat.

We crammed into two small hides and scanned the pool which held several Grey Herons, Mute Swan, Mallards, Moorhen and another Eurasian Teal. Then we found the GREAT WHITE EGRET tucked away in the reeds, this is a super bird for Northumberland we had heard that it was around. The bird failed to pop out of the reeds but we all saw it. Other species seen were Willow Warbler, Sedge and Reed Warblers and we heard Chiffchaff.

Back at Seahouses we joined the throngs on the quayside and boarded our boat for the all-day birding trip at 11:45am (not quite all-day). For the next four hours we were in birder's heaven it was just fantastic, a birding experience that I will never forget.



We were taken around Staple Island and into tiny coves and inlets between the smaller islands where thousands and thousands of sea-birds were nesting. The sky was full of birds, the sea was covered in them, the noise and smell was almost too much at times.

Our two hours on Inner Farne was one of the birding highlights of my life, we landed at a small jetty which was covered in nesting Arctic Terns you had to tread carefully in case you crushed an egg or squashed a chick. The adult birds gave you a constant reminder that you were trespassing on their territory by screaming at you and dive-bombing your head. Many struck you it was very entertaining watching some 'non-birding' tourists panicking when attacked.

For the next two hours we walked along narrow footpaths that led to breeding colonies of so many species, I have never been so close to any of these species you could literally reach out and touch them. Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots, Arctic, Sandwich and Common Terns, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and Shags, it was truly amazing. We left the island totally mesmerised after such a wonderful experience.

Back at the quay we spent some time photographing the local semi-tame Eider Ducks before driving to Bamburgh Castle and onto to Budle Bay. We were hoping to see a few waders on the mud flats but the tide was too high at this time, so we decided to call it a day.

We enjoyed another superb dinner, I must say, that the food at the Beadnell Tower Hotel is really excellent. Our species list is up around the 80 mark, we never expected a high count on this trip so we are happy with what we have seen.

Tomorrow is our last day as we head off home in the afternoon.

DAY 4 – MONDAY 26TH JUNE 2017

BEADNELL HARBOUR - HARTHOPE VALLEY – CENTRAL NEWCASTLE

WEATHER: Overcast, some sunny spells, light wind. Temp 18C

Our last day had arrived we had up until 2pm to find more species and enjoy some inland scenic sites, but first we visited the beach area about a mile from the hotel. With the bus packed full of our luggage we departed from the hotel around 9am and set off for Beadnell Harbour.

From the beach area we scanned across Beadnell Bay and harbour where Oystercatchers, Eider Ducks, Arctic Terns and a few Black-headed Gulls were feeding. In the distance, along the sandy beach we could see a roped off area where a Little Tern colony was being closely monitored and protected. It was alive with terns we could just about make out both Little and Arctic Terns, we never had the time to walk there so we made do with the distant views using our scopes.

Our journey inland took us through some stunning landscapes, rolling hills and lovely green dales. We noted Lapwing, Mistle Thrush and many corvids along the way.

Harthope Valley is a local beauty-spot and very popular with walkers, it lies some 20 miles inland on the edge of the Cheviot Hills. A river runs along a wide, flat-bottomed valley and is bordered by steep sided hills covered in scrub, bracken and Hawthorne bushes, a patchy string of Alder trees follows the line of the bolder-strewn river.

From the car-park we walked a short way to a bridge from where we could hear both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff singing, a couple of Sand Martins flew over us and some Goldfinches landed in the Alder Trees nearby. We began our walk up river and after just 5 minutes we had our first Dipper sighting, it was a young bird feeding alone, probably let loose by its parent in the last few days.



Record shot of a juvenile Dipper

Next a Lesser Redpoll ‘buzzed’ over us and landed just ahead on top of a bush, it didn’t stay for long but showed well enough for some of the group to enjoy it. For the next couple of hours we walked further up the valley noting many species. In or around the river we saw Common Sandpiper, Grey and Pied Wagtails and on the hillside Common Pheasant, Red-legged Partridge, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Yellowhammer and lots of common birds.



My group in the Harthope Valley

Our main target bird, the Ring Ouzel, was nowhere to be seen, I think we would have to climb to the top of the hills to have any chance of seeing one. A Red Deer went onto to the mammal list and we had good views of Whinchat, Stonechat and we had more sightings of Dipper and Common Sandpiper. We watched a Peregrine Falcon circling just as a Curlew called from high up on the hillside and a Northern Wheatear was the last new species that went onto the list.

We sat near the bridge and ate our picnic lunch before climbing back onto the bus for our final journey back to Newcastle Central Train Station. We made a quick coffee stop in the nearest town called Wooler, where we saw yet another pair of Dippers.



At 3pm the trip was over, Nigel and I dropped the group off in Newcastle and we set off back to Somerset, I dropped Nigel back at home in Chepstow and continued onto Somerset arriving at 10:30pm, another long day.....good night!

This concludes my spring programme of birding tours, the Autumn Migration Tours start in September, I still have spaces on those tours, if you are interested please get in touch.

SPECIES RECORDED BETWEEN 22ND AND 26TH JUNE 2017

SPECIES			DATES									
			23	24	25	26	22					
1	Mute Swan		X	X	X							
2	Greylag Goose			X								
3	Canada Goose			X								
4	Mallard		X	X	X							
5	Tufted Duck			X	X							
6	Gadwall			X								
7	Teal				X							
8	Eider Duck		X	X	X	X						
9	Common Scoter						X					
10	Grey Partridge						X					
11	Red-legged Partridge					X						
12	Common Pheasant			X	X	X						

13	Fulmar		X	X										
14	Manx Shearwater		X											
15	Northern Gannet		X	X	X	X								
16	Great Cormorant		X	X	X	X								
17	European Shag		X	X	X									
18	Great Egret				X									
19	Grey Heron		X	X	X	X								
20	Little Grebe			X	X									
21	Great Crested Grebe							X						
22	Common Buzzard		X	X										
23	Common Kestrel		X	X										
24	Peregrine Falcon					X								
25	Common Moorhen		X	X	X									
26	Eurasian Coot			X										
27	Oystercatcher		X	X	X	X								
28	Ringed Plover			X	X									
29	Lapwing		X	X	X	X								
30	Red Knot		X											
31	Dunlin			X										
32	Common Snipe							X						
33	Bar-tailed Godwit			X										
34	Curlew			X	X	H								
35	Redshank		X											
36	Common Sandpiper			X		X								
37	Kittiwake		X	X	X									
38	Black - headed Gull		X	X	X	X								
39	Little Gull			X										
40	Common Gull				X									
41	Lesser Black-backed Gull		X	X	X	X								
42	Herring Gull		X	X	X	X								
43	Great Black-backed Gull		X	X	X									
44	Little Tern			X		X								
45	Sandwich Tern		X	X	X									
46	Common Tern			X	X									
47	Roseate Tern		X	X										
48	Arctic Tern			X	X	X								
49	Guillemot		X	X	X									
50	Razorbill		X		X									
51	Puffin		X	X	X									
52	Feral Pigeon		X	X	X	X								
53	Woodpigeon		X	X	X	X								
54	Collared Dove		X	X	X	X								
55	Common Swift		X	X	X	X								
56	Magpie			X	X	X								
57	Jay													
58	Jackdaw		X	X	X	X								
59	Carrion Crow		X	X	X	X								

60	Rook		X	X	X	X								
61	Blue Tit					X								
62	Great Tit			X										
63	Skylark		X	X	X	X								
64	Sand Martin		X	X	X	X								
65	Barn Swallow		X	X	X	X								
66	House Martin		X	X	X	X								
67	Chiffchaff		H	H	H	X								
68	Willow Warbler		H	H	X	X								
69	Blackcap					H								
70	Common Whitethroat		X	H	X	X								
71	Sedge Warbler				X									
72	Wren		X	H	X	X								
73	Common Starling		X	X	X	X								
74	Dipper					X								
75	Blackbird		X	X	X	X								
76	Song Thrush			X	H	X								
77	Mistle Thrush			H		X								
78	Robin			X		X								
79	Whinchat					X								
80	Stonechat		X		X	X								
81	Northern Wheatear					X								
82	House Sparrow		X	X	X	X								
83	Tree Sparrow		X		X									
84	Grey Wagtail					X								
85	Pied Wagtail		X	X	X	X								
86	Meadow Pipit		X	X	X	X								
87	Rock Pipit			X										
88	Chaffinch		X	X		X								
89	Greenfinch				X	X								
90	Goldfinch		X	X	X	X								
91	Linnet			X	X	X								
92	Lesser Redpoll					X								
93	Yellowhammer		X		H	X								
94	Reed Bunting				X									

BUTTERFLY SPECIES			DATES											
			23	24	25	26								
1	Small Tortoiseshell			X										
2	Red Admiral			X	X									
3	Speckled Wood			X										
4	Wall Brown				X									
MAMMALS, REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS			DATES											

			23	24	25	26										
1	Red Deer					X										
2	Red Squirrel			X												
3	Hare				X											
4	Rabbit			X												
5	Hedgehog		X													
6	Grey Seal			X	X											