



**1-DAY NORFOLK WINTER BIRDING TOUR –
THE YARE VALLEY**

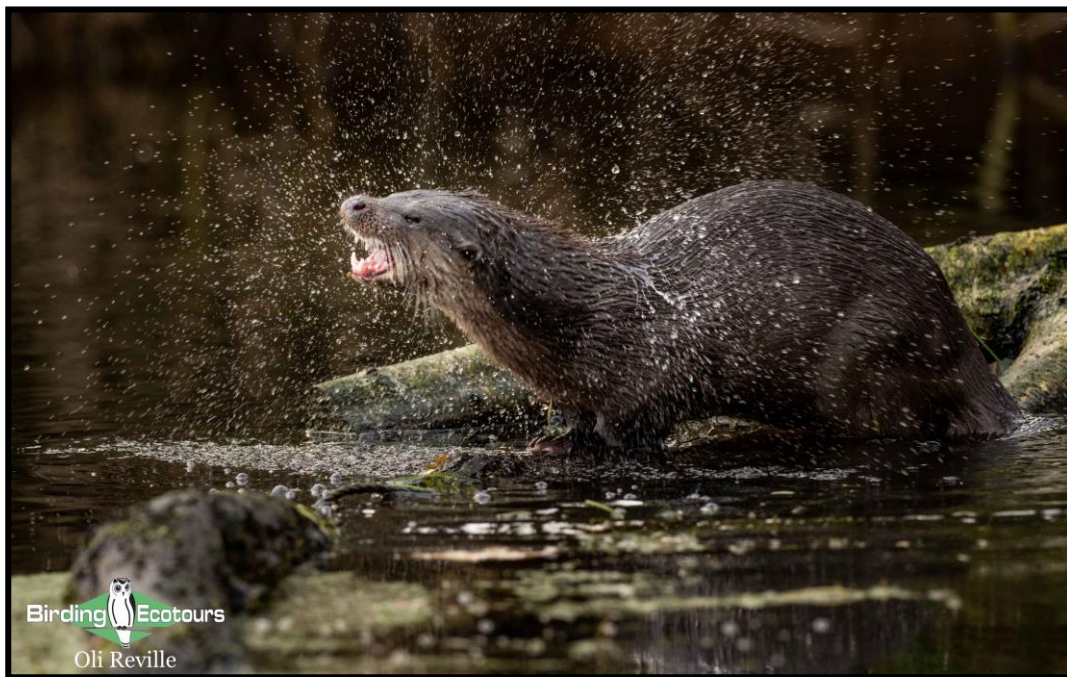
NOVEMBER – MARCH



Eurasian Bittern always provides a challenge to see but are a worthwhile pursuit on our Yare Valley tour. This picture shows just how well they are camouflaged!

This 1-day winter tour will see us visit the breathtaking Mid-Yare National Nature Reserve and its surrounds. The Yare Valley is a vast expanse of wet grasslands, marshes and reedbeds around the River Yare running from the outskirts of Norwich all the way to Breydon Water at Great Yarmouth. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) plays an important role in the maintenance and improvement of the area and it has become a huge success story in recent years, with several nationally rare species of fauna and flora thriving in the area. Our tour here will begin at 9am and finish around dusk (times will vary slightly throughout the winter period).

We will begin our tour at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen, the premier reserve in the area. We will spend the morning exploring this sensational reserve which boasts a superb array of species during the winter months. We begin by observing the feeders around the visitor center where we will come across typical garden birds such as **European Robin**, **Common Blackbird**, **Great Tit**, and **Common Chaffinch**. However, these feeders can attract scarcer species such as **Eurasian Bullfinch**, **Brambling**, **Eurasian Siskin**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, and even the outside chance of **Common Redpoll** or **Lesser Redpoll**. Looking out from the reserve hide (blind) we stand a good chance of spotting **Eurasian Otter** moving across the area of water in front of us and it is also our first chance to try and spot the elusive and enigmatic **Eurasian Bittern**. Other species that can be seen here include **Eurasian Teal**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Tufted Duck**, **Gadwall**, **Little Grebe**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, and **Common Kingfisher**.



Eurasian Otters have become a much more common sight in recent years and we stand a good chance of coming across one on our tour.

Moving through an area of woodland we will keep our eyes peeled for the species mentioned above plus others such as **Coal Tit**, **Marsh Tit**, and **Eurasian Treecreeper**. We may also come across wintering thrush flocks containing **Redwing** and **Fieldfare** plus more solitary thrushes such as

Song Thrush and **Mistle Thrush**. There is also the outside chance of the striking **Bohemian Waxwing**, but this will depend on the prevailing conditions of the winter. We will also keep our eyes on the ground here as this area can hold skulking and secretive **Water Rail** and **Eurasian Woodcock** at this time of year.

We will emerge from the woodland area and overlook a vast area of wet grassland. A scan here can reveal **Western Barn Owl**, **Mute Swan**, **Grey Heron**, **Little Egret**, **Common Buzzard**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Common Kestrel**, **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, and even scarcer species such as **Whooper Swan**, **Short-eared Owl**, and with luck, **Hen Harrier**. This is also a good spot for seeing the strange-looking **Chinese Water Deer**.

We will move through the reserve and stop at a series of hides that are in strategic positions for watching wildlife. Careful scanning of the waterways close to the path may give us a glimpse of the shy **European Water Vole**, an increasingly rare species in the United Kingdom (UK). We will pause and spend some time looking over the Yare River and across to the Wheatfen broad reedbeds. This spot is particularly good for birds of prey and gives us a further chance of **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Short-eared Owl**, and **Hen Harrier**, plus **Peregrine Falcon** and **Merlin**. **Eurasian Bittern** can also be evident between this spot and the superb tower hide on the reserve. The tower hide serves as a vantage point which gives us a great view over the reserve and we will spend some time here scanning the reedbeds. We will continue our loop around the reserve, stopping at points of interest, before making our way back to the visitor center. After a stop for a toilet break, we will drive a short way to our second site of the day where we will spend the afternoon.



*Both bean geese species can sometimes be found among the many **Pink-footed Geese** (left) that winter in the Yare Valley. Here two **Taiga Bean Geese** (right) join their more abundant cousin.*

Our afternoon will be spent in the wilderness of RSPB Buckenham Marshes reserve. This vast expanse of marshland, reedbed, wetland, and grazing meadow is a haven for wildlife, especially birds, and a winter visit here is often hugely productive. We begin by crossing the railway line into the marshes; Buckenham Marshes station is officially the least busy railway station in the UK! From here we will scan and observe the vast flocks of wildfowl that spend the winter in the valley. Vast numbers of **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Eurasian Teal**, and **Mallard** make up most of the numbers, however, we will also stand a chance of **Gadwall** and **Northern Pintail**, the latter stunning.

Pink-footed Goose skeins will pass overhead but those on the marshes will be scanned with great care in the hope of picking up some scarcer species such as **Greater White-fronted Goose**. The real highlight here is the chance of finding both bean geese species. **Tundra Bean Goose** is by far the more common of the two, however Buckenham Marshes is one of the best places in the UK for finding the rarer **Taiga Bean Goose**. The site is also a good spot for wintering swans, and we will scan the **Mute Swans** with the chance of spotting the scarce **Tundra Swan** (Bewick's Swan) and **Whooper Swan**. The wetlands are also a great wintering site for wading birds (shorebirds) with species such as **Northern Lapwing**, **Dunlin**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **European Golden Plover**, **Northern Lapwing**, **Common Snipe**, **Common Redshank**, **Green Sandpiper**, and **Eurasian Oystercatcher** often all present during the winter season and there is also the chance of a surprise **Jack Snipe** here too. This area is also a great wintering area for the scarce **Water Pipit**, always a sought-after species.

As we make our way through the marshes, we will keep our eyes peeled for birds of prey such as **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Common Buzzard**, **Red Kite**, **Common Kestrel**, **Peregrine Falcon**, and **Merlin**. As the day progresses, we may locate a **Western Barn Owl** and we stand a good chance of seeing **Short-eared Owl** as they quarter over the area looking for small mammals.



Short-eared Owl is a winter visitor to the valley, and we will spend time scanning the marshes and grazing meadows for this stunning species.

We will continue our walk around the reserve, stopping at various points to scan the mass of wildfowl present before walking the same path back towards the car park. As the afternoon progresses, we should start to see more birds of prey as many roost in the adjacent marshes across the River Yare. With luck we may observe **Hen Harrier** among the more numerous **Western Marsh Harrier** and the skies should begin filling with more skeins of geese returning from their feeding grounds elsewhere in the valley. Our final spectacle of the day, as the sun sets, will be watching the common and widespread **Rook** as they return in numbers to their large rookery near the train station, certain to be a great end to a wonderful day in this truly special part of Norfolk.

Winter in the Yare Valley can also offer up some bonus species. During our tour we will keep our eyes peeled for **Great Grey Shrike**, **Long-eared Owl**, **Glossy Ibis**, and **Great (White) Egret**, any of which would provide a nice addition to the trip list.

Duration: 1-day - 9am till dusk (*time will vary throughout the winter season*)
Group Size: 2 - 5 (*following current Covid-19 restrictions*)
Dates: November - March
Start: RSPB Strumpshaw Fen car park
End: RSPB Buckenham Marshes car park
Price: £50 per person, minimum of 2 people (*note we can also run this day tour for 1 person, the cost for this would be £100*).

Price includes:

Guiding fees

Price excludes:

Transport

Lunch

Items of a personal nature

Entrance fee for RSPB Strumpshaw Fen (£3.50 per person for 2020)

Gratuities (*please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#)*)

Important Note

The paths at both sites we visit can be extremely muddy during the winter period. Please make sure you bring appropriate footwear. Buckenham Marshes is also incredibly open and exposed to the elements, please wrap up warm and bring something waterproof.

Important Covid-19 considerations:

Our general comments and considerations on Covid-19 and the running of tours can be found on our frequently updated blog [here](#). Please carefully read the latest update and please also read our day tour Covid-19 protocol provided [here](#).