



**UNITED KINGDOM:
ENGLAND IN WINTER TOUR**

06 – 19 NOVEMBER 2021

10 – 23 JANUARY 2022

09 – 22 JANUARY 2023

08 – 21 JANUARY 2024



Eurasian Bittern is one of our secretive targets on this trip.

Situated on the northwestern edge of Europe and the Western Palearctic biogeographical zone, the United Kingdom is blessed (as a result of the Gulf Stream) with milder winters than most of continental Europe at a similar latitude. As such, large numbers of birds find themselves overwintering in the country rather than needing to fly farther south, thus saving themselves vital energy resources to survive these difficult months.

This tour of the eastern side of England occurs during the peak mid-winter period and will focus on finding a wide range of resident species and the numerous winter visitors.

Overwintering wildfowl, shorebirds, gulls, thrushes, finches, tits, and buntings (and other passerines) from northern and eastern Europe and further east into Asia swell numbers of birds usually present in the country and provide an interesting winter suite of birds to chase after. Some of these could include **Whooper Swan**, **Tundra Swan** (Bewick's Swan), **Pink-footed Goose**, **Taiga Bean Goose**, **Tundra Bean Goose**, **Greater White-fronted Goose**, **Greater Scaup**, **Smew**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common Scoter**, **Velvet Scoter**, **Caspian Gull**, **Yellow-legged Gull**, **Iceland Gull**, **Glaucous Gull**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **European Golden Plover**, **Fieldfare**, **Redwing**, **Horned Lark** (Shore Lark), **Snow Bunting**, **Lapland Longspur** (Lapland Bunting), **Twite**, **Brambling**, **Hawfinch**, and with luck, as it is an irruptive species, **Bohemian Waxwing**, one of the best-looking birds in Europe.



Bohemian Waxwing is an irruptive winter visitor to the United Kingdom. It is always a crowd-pleaser when it does appear, sometimes in large numbers.

There are many rare, scarce, or very local (or just plain secretive) wintering species in England during the winter months, and we will target as many of these as possible during the tour. Some of them may include **Bearded Reedling** (Bearded Tit), **Eurasian Bittern**, **Red Kite**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Hen Harrier**, **Ruff**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Willow Ptarmigan** (Red Grouse), **Black Grouse**, **Water Rail**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Eurasian Woodcock**, **Short-eared Owl**, **Long-eared Owl**, **Common Kingfisher**, and **Common Crane**.

For a visiting birder, or anyone interested in bird photography, this tour also offers great views of some of the common and gorgeous resident garden birds present in the United Kingdom, such as **European Robin**, **Eurasian Bullfinch**, **Eurasian Blue Tit**, **European Greenfinch**, **European Goldfinch**, **Common Blackbird**, **Song Thrush**, **Great Tit**, **European Nuthatch**, **Northern Lapwing**, and many more. Take a look at our "Common Birds of the UK" blog series for a more in depth and illustrated look at the common garden, farmland and woodland, and wetland and coastal birds of the UK. These common birds will also form an exciting part of this tour for anyone not familiar with the birds of the region.



A European Robin standing in the snow – a special winter-birding moment

Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in London and transfer to a hotel near the airport

After our arrival in London (Heathrow) during the day, we will transfer to our hotel and gather for our group evening welcome meal together. If you would like to explore the many tourist

attractions that London has to offer please organize for an early arrival or later departure. We can help arrange your plans for these activities should you need any help.

Overnight: Heathrow Airport area, London

Day 2. Transfer to North Norfolk

We will leave the Heathrow area after breakfast and we will commence our journey to North Norfolk, our base for the next four nights. Birding near London may get our lists going with some of the many exotic species present in the United Kingdom, such as **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, **Mandarin Duck**, or **Egyptian Goose**. We will also likely see the first of the common species that we will see over the course of our tour, such as **Eurasian Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **European Goldfinch**, **Eurasian Bullfinch**, **Common Wood Pigeon**, and **Eurasian Magpie**. We may also find our first overwintering **Fieldfare** and **Redwing**. At this time of year many of the **Common Blackbirds**, **Song Thrushes**, and **European Robins** present are of continental European origin and overwintering in the United Kingdom, and they can be quite abundant in some areas.



Eurasian Bullfinch, a beautiful and often secretive species.

On arrival in Norfolk one of our first stops will likely be the Thetford Forest area, where in winter we can sometimes find some great birds such as **Red Crossbill** (Common Crossbill), **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Hawfinch**, **Common Firecrest**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Siskin**, **Lesser Redpoll**, **Marsh Tit**, and **Great Grey Shrike**. If we don't have time to visit on this day we will be sure to fit a visit to this site in on a following day.

Overnight: North Norfolk

Days 3 - 5. North Norfolk

We will spend three full days birding in North Norfolk and adjacent counties as we explore East Anglia. The area is rightly considered one of the best birding areas in the whole of the United Kingdom and great for a varied selection of overwintering birds. Some of the coastal and inland reserves we will likely visit during our time in the area include Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Titchwell Marsh, RSPB Lakenheath Fen reserve, Snettisham RSPB reserve, Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) Cley Marshes, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT) Welney Wetland Centre, NWT Hickling Broad, and Holkham Hall & Estate, among others.

Over the course of our time in Norfolk and surroundings we will seek out the vast array of overwintering wildfowl on offer. This should include flocks of **Pink-footed Geese** and **Greylag Geese** (the former forming flocks in the thousands) as well as scarcer species such as **Brant Goose** (the dark-bellied form known as Dark-bellied Brent Goose), **Barnacle Goose**, **Taiga Bean Goose**, **Tundra Bean Goose**, and **Greater White-fronted Goose**. Sometimes the geese flocks in Norfolk can contain a vagrant to the United Kingdom such as **Red-breasted Goose**, **Snow Goose**, or **Lesser White-fronted Goose**, and we will keep our eyes firmly peeled for anything unusual. Other wildfowl we are likely to see include **Whooper Swan**, **Tundra Swan** (Bewick's Swan), **Mute Swan**, **Common Shelduck**, **Common Scoter**, **Velvet Scoter**, **Common Eider**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Tufted Duck**, **Greater Scaup**, and **Common Pochard**. With luck we might even find **Smew**, a scarce winter visitor.



*A pair of **Pink-footed Geese** (left) sit with a pair of **Tundra Bean Geese** (right) as they take a brief break from foraging.*

The shorebird spectacle along the coast of Norfolk can be spectacular at high tide, and we will make sure to check out some roost sites with numbers of **Red Knot**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**,

Eurasian Oystercatcher, Eurasian Curlew, Sanderling, Dunlin, and other species such as **Common Ringed Plover, European Golden Plover, Northern Lapwing, and Grey Plover**. Nearby marsh habitat is likely to hold **Spotted Redshank, Common Redshank, Common Snipe**, and maybe even an overwintering **Green Sandpiper**.

Raptors feature heavily during the winter when several species form communal roosts, and while most of the species mentioned could be bumped into during the course of regular birding we will look at roost sites for **Western Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Common Kestrel, Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, and sometimes **Rough-legged Buzzard** (an irruptive winter visitor) or **White-tailed Eagle**, a species that is expanding its range in the country due to recent national reintroduction programs and an increasing population in Europe. While we wait at the roost sites we may also find some of the secretive species of the area like **Short-eared Owl, Western Barn Owl, Common Crane, Eurasian Spoonbill, and Eurasian Bittern**.



*A close-quartering **Western Barn Owl** in the winter late-afternoon sunlight, a spectacular sight!*

Several of the beaches and surrounding marshlands can support some interesting passerines such as **Snow Bunting, Twite, Horned Lark** (Shore Lark), **European Rock Pipit, Water Pipit**, and **Meadow Pipit**, while the local farmland may hold **Eurasian Skylark, Common Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting**, and mixed finch flocks. The woodland may support **Tawny Owl, Eurasian Jay, European Green Woodpecker**, and **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**.

Overnight: North Norfolk

Day 6. Transfer between North Norfolk and the City of York

We will travel between Norfolk and York after a final morning birding in North Norfolk. We will likely stop at one or two locations on the way which may yield specific target species, and we will select these at the time based on up-to-date local information. There are several waterbodies along the route that sometimes hold interesting overwintering species, and we may be able to find something along the lines of **Smew**, **Black-throated Loon** (Black-throated Diver), **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver), **Red-throated Loon** (Red-throated Diver), **Horned Grebe** (Slavonian Grebe), **Black-necked Grebe**, or some unusual geese to break up the drive.



Whooper Swans are an elegant winter visitor to the United Kingdom, and it is usual to see family groups sticking together within large flocks

York, a fascinating and beautiful walled city packed full of historical features (minster, castle, churches, and more) will be our base for the next four nights while we spend time birding in Yorkshire.

Overnight: York

Day 7. York Area

We will spend the full day birding in the vast wooded and farmland landscape of the Vale of York and the surrounding hills (the Chalk Wolds). The arable and pastoral farmland forms an intricate patchwork of habitats, and many areas are managed specially for the unique plants that exist in the area as well as the rich birdlife of the area. 'Common land' also forms an incredibly

important habitat. Part of the farmland in the Vale of York is a seasonally flooded wetland, and during the winter months there are usually vast areas of standing water.

As a result of these habitats the area is extremely rich in birdlife during the winter period. Wildfowl and shorebirds proliferate at this time of year. A wintering herd of **Whooper Swans** is an annual feature in the area, occasionally pulling in the rare **Tundra Swan** (Bewick's Swan) and a range of geese such as **Pink-footed Goose** and **Greater White-fronted Goose** usually in small numbers, although **Greylag Goose** and **Canada Goose** can both be abundant.

Flocks of thousands of **Eurasian Wigeon** and **Eurasian Teal** sometimes harbor a vagrant **American Wigeon** or **Green-winged Teal**, whereas flocks of **Northern Pintail**, **Northern Shoveler**, and **Gadwall** are common in the shallows. If the water levels are high diving ducks such as **Common Pochard**, **Tufted Duck**, **Greater Scaup**, **Common Goldeneye**, and **Common Merganser** (Goosander) may be present together with **Great Crested Grebe**, **Little Grebe**, and **Eurasian Coot**.

Shorebirds are usually present and can include **Jack Snipe**, **Common Snipe**, **Dunlin**, **Common Redshank**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Ruff**, **European Golden Plover**, and **Northern Lapwing**, the latter two often numbering into the thousands of each. They can, however, often be flighty, not surprising given that the area often supports overwintering raptors such as **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Common Buzzard**, **Red Kite**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Merlin**, **Common Kestrel**, and **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**.



Hawfinch is a scarce winter visitor to the area, but we hope to connect with some of these huge-billed, beautiful finches during the tour.

Farmland and woodland birds we will look for while in the area include **Corn Bunting**, **Common Reed Bunting**, **Yellowhammer**, **Marsh Tit**, **Willow Tit**, **European Green**

Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Skylark, Common Linnet, European Goldfinch, Red-legged Partridge, Grey Partridge, Common Pheasant, Rook, Western Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Eurasian Magpie, Eurasian Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Eurasian Nuthatch, Dunnock, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Redwing, Fieldfare, Common Blackbird, Common Chaffinch, Brambling, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, and Hawfinch.

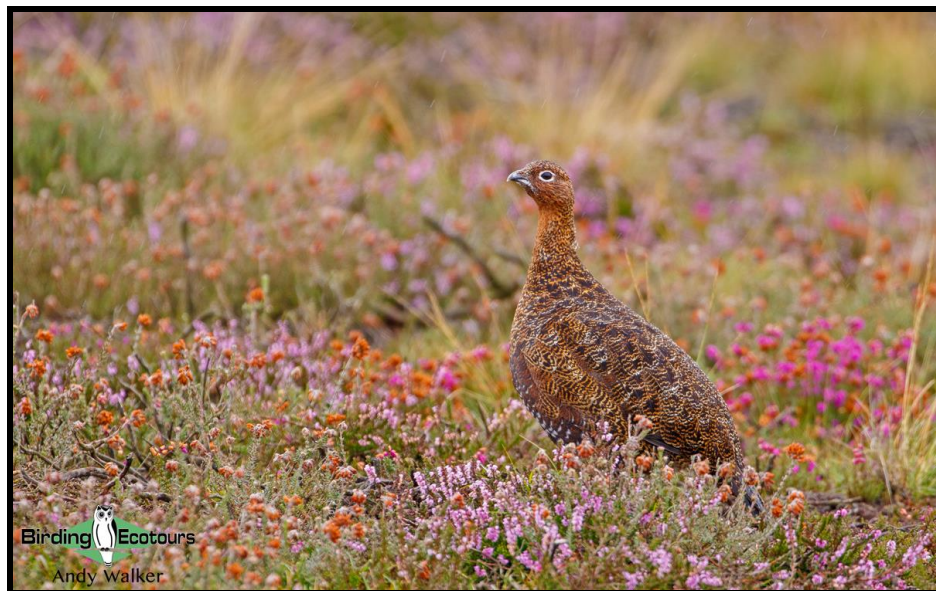
Often a winter gull roost forms, and we will seek out scarcities such as **Mediterranean Gull, Iceland Gull, Glaucous Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Caspian Gull, and Lesser Black-backed Gull** among the more numerous **European Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Mew Gull** (Common Gull), and **Black-headed Gull**.

We will keep our eyes peeled late in the afternoon for **Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Little Owl, and Tawny Owl**, all of which can occasionally be found.

Overnight: York

Days 8 - 9. Yorkshire birding

We will spend the following two days exploring some of the many other birding hotspots of Yorkshire beyond our base in York (as well as back around York as conditions dictate). Some of the sites usually excellent for winter birding that we might visit include Tophill Low Nature Reserve, North York Moors National Park, Blacktoft Sands RSPB reserve, RSPB Fairburn Ings Nature Reserve, and RSPB Bempton Cliffs Nature Reserve. These sites will give us multiple opportunities at the birds described above for the York area but will also provide some additional species. For example, our birding on the North York Moors National Park may offer us the opportunity to find the *scotica* subspecies of **Willow Ptarmigan**, considered a full species by Avibase Taxonomic Concepts and known as Red Grouse, which would make it an endemic to the United Kingdom.



Willow Ptarmigan, or Red Grouse as it is known in the United Kingdom, is an attractive endemic subspecies or species depending on your taxonomic standpoint.

We will be sure to spend some time at the coast, where at this time of year we might find **Iceland Gull** or **Glaucous Gull** with **European Herring Gulls** (of which we should see two subspecies) as well as species such as **Purple Sandpiper**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, and **European Shag**. We will also look for sea ducks, grebes, loons (divers), and auks that may still be offshore.

Other species that we will look for at this time include **Cetti's Warbler**, **Bearded Reedling** (Bearded Tit), **European Stonechat**, **Water Pipit**, **European Rock Pipit**, **Lapland Longspur** (Lapland Bunting), **Snow Bunting**, **Horned Lark** (Shore Lark), **Red Crossbill** (Common Crossbill), **Lesser Redpoll**, **Common Redpoll**, **Eurasian Siskin**, **Horned Grebe** (Slavonian Grebe), **Eurasian Bittern**, **Little Egret**, **Great White Egret**, **Little Gull**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Common Kingfisher**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Grey Wagtail**, and **White Wagtail** (Pied Wagtail), and we might be able to find an overwintering **Common Chiffchaff**, **Eurasian Blackcap**, **Black Redstart**, **Bohemian Waxwing**, or **Common Firecrest**.

Overnight: York



*We hope to find **Common Firecrest** during the tour. It has a shocking flash of color on its head!*

Day 10. Transfer between Yorkshire and Northumberland

This will be a travel day as we move between York and our base near Alnwick, Northumberland. We will make a couple of stops along the way depending on what we've seen over the past couple of days, and one of these slight detours will take us on a road where we will keep our eyes peeled for the stunning **Black Grouse**, a rare and very local bird in England.

Overnight: Northumberland

Days 11 - 12. Northumberland Coast

We will have two full days birding in Northumberland. We will expect similar species to those listed above, but some coastal birding here should give us different geese, such as **Brant Goose** (Pale-bellied Brent Goose) and **Barnacle Goose**, on the mudflats along with **Common Shelduck** and a wide range of shorebirds, such as **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Grey Plover**, and others. We should also get further chances for **Horned Grebe** (Slavonian Grebe), **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver), **Red-throated Loon** (Red-throated Diver), or **Black-throated Loon** (Black-throated Diver), **Purple Sandpiper**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, and maybe a lingering **Great Skua**, **Black-legged Kittiwake**, or **Northern Gannet**. **Red Kite** and **Rough-legged Buzzard** could also be possible.

Interesting passerines possible here could include **Snow Bunting**, **Lapland Longspur** (Lapland Bunting), **Bohemian Waxwing**, **Horned Lark** (Shore Lark), and **Twite** among the more common and widespread resident species and migrants such as **Fieldfare** and **Redwing**.



*We will look for overwintering **Snow Bunting** during our time on the east coast.*

Waterfowl flocks that overwinter off the coast of Northumberland may contain **Common Scoter** and the odd surprise like **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Velvet Scoter**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common Eider**, or something much rarer, like **King Eider**, **Black Scoter** or **White-winged Scoter**, so we will be sure to keep a careful eye on that possibility over the course of our stay.

Overnight: Northumberland

Day 13. Northumberland to London

We will spend the day driving back to London (Heathrow Airport) from Northumberland. We will pay careful attention to the local rare-bird news and see if we can add something interesting along the route, maybe some newly arrived **Bohemian Waxwing** or something else exciting.

Overnight: Heathrow Airport area, London

Day 14: International departure

This is a non-birding day with international departures from Heathrow.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 14 days

Group Size: 6 - 8

Dates: 06 – 19 November 2021
10 – 23 January 2022
09 – 22 January 2023
08 – 21 January 2024

Start: London, England (Heathrow Airport)

End: London, England (Heathrow Airport)

Prices: GBP£4,920 per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants (2021)
GBP£4,920 per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants (2022)
GBP£5,410 per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants (2023)
GBP£TBC (we expect 2024 prices to be 5-10 % higher than 2023 prices)
per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants (2024)

Single Supplements: GBP£964 (2021)
GBP£964 (2022)
GBP£1,060 (2023)
GBP£TBC (2024)

Price includes:

Meals (from evening meal on day 1 until breakfast on day 14)

Accommodation (based on sharing)

Guiding fees

All entrance fees to national parks, nature reserves, bird blinds/hides, etc.

All ground transport while on tour including airport pick-up and drop-off
Tolls

Price excludes:

International flights

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access when no free WiFi available, etc.

Alcoholic and soft drinks

Personal insurance

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