

UNITED KINGDOM: ENGLAND IN SPRING CUSTOM TOUR TRIP REPORT

29 APRIL - 10 MAY 2022



Atlantic Puffin gave us many wonderful experiences during our bird tour of England.



Overview

Our 12-day custom tour of England (which ended in southern Scotland) began on the 29th of April 2022, in London, and concluded on the 10th of May 2022, in Edinburgh. During the tour we visited famous birding locations like <u>Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Minsmere Nature Reserve, Cley and Salthouse Marshes, Welney Wildfowl and Wetland Trusts (WWT) Reserve, RSPB Bempton Cliffs, and the <u>Farne Islands National Nature Reserve</u>. This private tour was loosely based on our <u>United Kingdom: Ultimate Spring Tour</u>, but at a much more relaxed pace (which meant we didn't see as many species as we would usually expect to see), with more cultural aspects enjoyed and non-birding activities included. It also didn't cover the section in the Highlands of Scotland where we would usually look for the Scottish specials.</u>

A total of 147 bird species were recorded during the tour and included superb species such as **King Eider**, **Velvet Scoter**, **Garganey**, **Black Grouse**, **Willow Ptarmigan** (the British endemic subspecies known as Red Grouse), **Eurasian Bittern**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Common Crane**, **Eurasian Dotterel**, **European Golden Plover**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Blacktailed Godwit**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Arctic Tern**, tens of thousands of alcids (including **Atlantic Puffin**), **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Red Kite**, **Common Cuckoo**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Common Nightingale**, **Bearded Reedling**, **European Pied Flycatcher**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Common Firecrest**, **Dartford Warbler**, and **Wood Warbler**. The tour also featured plenty of common and attractive resident and migrant species. Species lists are given at the end of the report.

I would like to thank Bill and Jayne for their company during the tour and the great memories shared. I look forward to birding with you again soon!



This Common Nightingale gave wonderful views while belting its impressive song out.



Detailed Report

Day 1, 29th April 2022. Arrival in London, England and transfer to Suffolk

The first day of the tour was an arrival and transfer day from London Heathrow to Westleton in Suffolk. After a three-hour drive from Heathrow airport in London, we arrived in rural eastern Suffolk to relax at our hotel. In the evening we took a short drive to look for **Common Nightingale** and had three birds singing, however sadly none showed well, but it was good to know that they had arrived from their <u>African</u> wintering grounds and we'd be sure to look for them early the following day.



While in Suffolk we enjoyed amazing views of the striking breeding-plumaged **Mediterranean Gull** (photo Peter Dillon-Hooper, Wikimedia Commons).

Day 2, 30th April 2022. Birding Westleton, Dunwich, Minsmere, and Hickling

Today we began early in search of the **Common Nightingale** once again. This time we had far more luck and enjoyed wonderful views of a singing bird. Other birds of note here included a singing **Common Cuckoo** and **Eurasian Blackcap**.

Our next stop was the scenic coastal area of <u>Dunwich Heath</u>. Here our target was **Dartford Warbler** and we enjoyed good, but distant, views of a stunning singing male. While on the heath we also found **European Stonechat**, **Common Linnet**, **Garden Warbler**, and **Eurasian Skylark**, while **Common Nightingale** and **Woodlark** were also heard here.

After breakfast it was time to head to <u>RSPB Minsmere</u>, one of the country's premier birding locations. With 64 species recorded during our visit, there were plenty of highlights, however the



sight of three **Eurasian Bitterns** flying over the reedbed was certainly the main highlight of our birding here. Notable mentions went to **Mediterranean Gull**, **Eurasian Hobby**, and **Sedge Warbler**.

Our final stop was over the border in Norfolk at <u>Hickling Broad Norfolk Wildlife Trust</u> (NWT). Here we enjoyed good views of a stunning **Black-winged Stilt** and a drake **Garganey**, plus other species such as **Common Crane**, **Eurasian Reed Warbler**, **Willow Warbler**, and **European Robin**. After a long day we arrived at our hotel on the Norfolk coast, our base for the next few nights.

Day 3, 1st May 2022. Birding Titchwell and Burnham Norton

This morning we visited <u>RSPB Titchwell</u>, yet another principal birding reserve. With beautiful weather we were able to enjoy species such as **Common Pochard**, **Stock Dove**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Ruff**, and **Western Marsh Harrier**. However, with 55 species recorded here there were plenty of other highlights.

After lunch we visited the far lesser-known <u>Burnham Norton marsh</u>. Despite the lack of spring rain leaving the area quite dry, we were able to enjoy good views of **Brant** (Dark-bellied Brent) **Goose**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Gadwall**, **Pied Avocet**, **Great Egret**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, and **Bearded Reedling** – an exciting monotypic family and attractive species.



While in Norfolk we enjoyed fabulous views of **Common Reed Bunting** (photo MPF, Wikimedia Commons).



Day 4, 2nd May 2022. Birding Burnham Overy, Blakeney, Cley, Salthouse, and Ringstead

We started today with a walk at <u>Burnham Overy dunes</u>. Lovely weather greeted us again and during our walk we enjoyed species like **Common Pochard**, **Grey Plover**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Sedge Warbler**, and **Common Reed Bunting**. After a short break we headed to the famous east bank at <u>Cley</u>. Many of the species we had seen previously were present here, but we also recorded **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **Eurasian Curlew**, and **Common Snipe** which were new for the trip. We also enjoyed good views of **Common Redshank**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, and **Bearded Reedling**.

After lunch we took a long walk to <u>Kelling Water Meadows</u> from Salthouse, where we recorded 38 species, including **Tufted Duck**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Rook**, **Sand Martin**, and **Common Whitethroat**

Our final birding of the day was a spontaneous stop near the village of Ringstead. Despite the cold wind we enjoyed distant views of **Eurasian Dotterel**, a great surprise to end a productive birding day.



Sedge Warblers were abundant in all suitable habitat during the tour and were extremely vocal on their return to breeding sites after spending the winter in Africa.

Day 5, 3rd May 2022. Birding Thornham, Snettisham, and Hunstanton

Our final day on the north Norfolk coast started at <u>Thornham Harbour</u>. Shortly after parking the car, we enjoyed close views of **Northern Wheatear** and, while walking the sea wall, we found some stunning **Ruff** molting into breeding plumage. In the harbor itself were **Grey Plover** and **Eurasian Curlew**. Our next stop was the very productive <u>Snettisham Coastal Park</u>. Here we enjoyed a number of species including **Tufted Duck**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Sedge Warbler**,



Lesser Whitethroat, and **Meadow Pipit**. A distant **Common Swift** was our first of the tour, but sadly at very long range (these are usually one of the last summer migrants to arrive back in the UK each year).

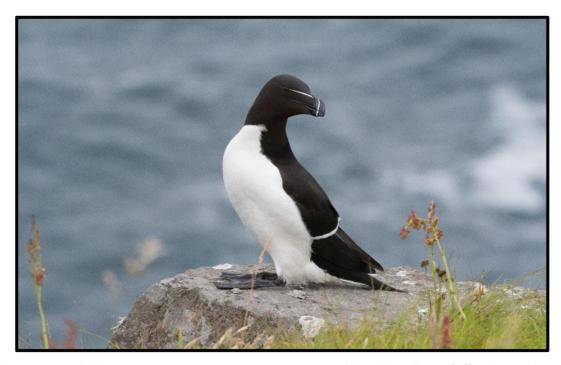
After lunch we walked the beach at <u>Hunstanton</u> and enjoyed great views of **Northern Fulmar** as they soared overhead and interacted on the cliffs at their nest sites.

Day 6, 4th May 2022. Birding Welney, Lynford, and Santon Downham

Reserve. We enjoyed a productive morning here with some standout scarce species like Western Cattle Egret and Glossy Ibis. A good number of Whooper Swan remained at the reserve and also here were Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Tern, Great Egret, Lesser Whitethroat, and Eurasian Tree Sparrow. After lunch we headed into Thetford Forest to Lynford Arboretum. Here we enjoyed brief views of Common Firecrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker, and Garden Warbler, as the weather closed in. Dodging the rain, our final birding location was Santon Downham. Sadly, we could not locate the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in poor weather, but did see Great Spotted Woodpecker and heard Eurasian Siskin and Red (Common) Crossbill.

Day 7, 5th May 2022. Bike ride, transfer to Yorkshire

Today was mainly a non-birding and travel day. In the morning Bill and Jayne took a bike ride in Thetford Forest. After lunch we began our journey to Yorkshire.



The massive cliffs at Bempton gave us amazing views of breeding **Razorbill** (photo Chme82, Wikimedia Commons).



Day 8, 6th May 2022. Birding Bempton Cliffs and the North Yorkshire Moors National Park

After yesterday's travel day we were itching to get back out birding. To begin, we headed to the world-famous <u>Bempton Cliffs RSPB Reserve</u>. This amazing seabird colony gave us sensational views of **Common Murre** (Common Guillemot), **Razorbill**, **Atlantic Puffin**, **Black-legged Kittiwake**, **European Herring Gull**, **Northern Fulmar**, and **Northern Gannet**. We also had distant views of **Corn Bunting** and enjoyed close views of **Eurasian Tree Sparrow**.

After lunch we headed into the North Yorkshire Moors. A random stop in <u>Forge Valley Woods</u> gave us our first **Tawny Owl**, **Coal Tit**, **Marsh Tit**, and **Eurasian Nuthatch** of the tour. Following this we visited a well-known site for European Turtle Dove, sadly none were present, but we did add **Yellowhammer** to our trip list.

With the weather closing in we headed onto the <u>moors</u>. To our surprise they were a hive of activity with Willow Ptarmigan (Red Grouse), European Golden Plover, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew, Common Snipe, Western Marsh Harrier, Mistle Thrush, Whinchat, Northern Wheatear, and Tree Pipit all present.



We enjoyed good views of **Yellowhammer** during the day.

Day 9, 7th May 2022. Birding North Yorkshire Moors, Saltholme RSPB, and the North Pennines

Today we would leave Yorkshire. Before doing so, we stopped in some woodland on the west side of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park, where we found, to our surprise, a pair of **Mandarin Duck**, an unexpected find. Also here were **Stock Dove**, **Common Cuckoo**, **Mistle Thrush**, and other common woodland species.



We headed next to <u>Saltholme RSPB reserve</u>. The site was busy with bird life, and we enjoyed good views of two drake **Garganey** as well as **Common Pochard**, **Pied Avocet**, **Sedge Warbler**, and other typical wetland species.

As we headed into the Pennines the sun emerged and we took a pleasant walk into <u>Derwent Gorge</u>. Here we enjoyed fantastic views of **European Pied Flycatcher** and **Wood Warbler**, plus added **Eurasian Treecreeper** and **Grey Wagtail** to our list.

Finally, we explored the moors near <u>Langdon Beck</u> which again were busy with birds, including **Black Grouse**, **Willow Ptarmigan** (Red Grouse), **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Northern Lapwing**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Common Redshank**, and **Tree Pipit**.



Willow Ptarmigan were one of many highlights of our brief time on the moors.

Day 10, 8th May 2022. Birding Langdon Beck, Farne Islands boat trip, and Holy Island

Today we headed further north into Northumberland towards the famous Farne Islands. Once again, we passed through the Langdon Beck area, where we recorded eight more **Black Grouse** and had great views of **European Golden Plover**.

We arrived at Seahouses in the late morning to catch the boat to the <u>Farne Islands</u>. A blustery but enjoyable three hours was spent among the huge seabird colonies that populate the islands. We had excellent close-range looks at Common Murre (Common Guillemot), Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, Northern Gannet, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern, Arctic Tern, European Shag, and Common Eider.

After lunch we took a short drive to Holy Island (Lindisfarne) where Bill and Jayne took a walk around the village on the island.





Lovely Common Eiders were yet another highlight from our enjoyable tour.

Day 11, 9th May 2022. Bamburgh Castle and birding Mussleburgh Pools

Our final full day saw us explore the wonderful Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland. A striking location full of relicts and monuments, emphasizing the rich history of the area. We also got to enjoy great views of **Northern Fulmar** nesting on the castle keep.

After lunch we left England and crossed the border into Scotland where we headed to Mussleburgh Pools to the east of Edinburgh. On the sea here we enjoyed great views of a first-summer drake **King Eider**, with a small group of **Common Eiders**. Further out a large raft of **Common Scoters** held a small number of **Velvet Scoters**, while **Northern Gannet** fished close to the shore.

On the freshwater pools of the site, the typical common wetland species were present including **Common Shelduck**, **Common Redshank**, and **Gadwall**, while a purpose-built **Sand Martin** colony held a good number of breeding birds.

Our final stop of the day, and the tour, was the River Esk on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Walking the riverside path we enjoyed great views of a juvenile **White-throated Dipper**, which was feeding in the rocks of the fast-flowing river. An amazing way to end the tour.

Day 12, 10th May 2022. International departure from Edinburgh, Scotland

The tour concluded with an early flight from Edinburgh airport.



Bird List - Following IOC (12.1)

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen.

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened

Common Name	Scientific Name
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
Brant (Dark-bellied Brent) Goose	Branta bernicla
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis
Barnacle Goose	Branta leucopsis
Greylag Goose	Anser answer
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor
Whooper Swan	Cygnus cygnus
Egyptian Goose	Alopochen aegyptiaca
Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna
Mandarin Duck	Aix galericulata
Garganey	Spatula querquedula
Northern Shoveler	Spatula clypeata
Gadwall	Mareca strepera
Eurasian Wigeon	Mareca penelope
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos
Eurasian Teal	Anas crecca
Common Pochard - VU	Aythya farina
Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula
King Eider	Somateria spectabilis
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima
Velvet Scoter - VU	Melanitta fusca
Common Scoter	Melanitta nigra
Pheasants & Allies (Phasianidae)	
Willow Ptarmigan (Red Grouse)	Lagopus lagopus scotia
Black Grouse	Lyrurus tetrix
Common Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus
Red-legged Partridge	Alectoris rufa
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Swifts (Apodidae)	·
Common Swift	Apus apus
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	
Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	Columba livia. dom.



Common Name	Scientific Name	
Stock Dove	Columba oenas	
Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	
Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)		
Water Rail (H)	Rallus aquaticus	
Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	
Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra	
Cranes (Gruidae)		
Common Crane	Grus grus	
Common Cranc	Gras gras	
Grebes (Podicipedidae)		
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	
Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus	
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Oystercatchers (Haematopodidae)		
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus	
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Stilts, Avocets (Recurvirostridae)		
Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	
Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta	
Plovers (Charadriidae)		
Northern Lapwing - NT	Vanellus vanellus	
European Golden Plover	Pluvialis apricaria	
Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatarola	
Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	
Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius	
Eurasian Dotterel	Charadrius morinellus	
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)		
Eurasian Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus	
Eurasian Curlew - NT	Numenius arquata	
Bar-tailed Godwit - NT	Limosa lapponica	
Black-tailed Godwit - NT	Limosa limosa	
Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres	
Ruff	Calidris pugnax	
Dunlin	Calidris alpina	
Purple Sandpiper	Calidris maritima	
Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago	
Common Redshank	Tringa totanus	
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Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae)		









Common Name	Scientific Name	
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)		
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus	
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	
Accentors (Prunellidae)		
Dunnock	Prunella modularis	
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)		
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	
White (Pied) Wagtail	Motacilla alba yarrellii	
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis	
Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis	
Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae)		
Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	
European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris	
Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina	
Red (Common) Crossbill (H)	Loxia curvirostra curvirostra	
European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	
Eurasian Siskin	Spinus spinus	
Buntings (Emberizidae)		
Corn Bunting	Emberiza calandra	
Yellowhammer	Emberiza citronella	
Common Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus	
Total seen	142	
Total heard only	5	

Mammal List

147

Common Name	Scientific Name	
Rabbits and Hares (Leporidae)		
European Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus	
Brown Hare	Lepus europaeus	
Deer (Cervidae)		
Red Deer	Cervus elaphus	



Total recorded

Common Name	Scientific Name
European Roe Deer	Capreolus capreolus
Reeves' Muntjac	Muntiacus reevesi
(Chinese) Water Deer	Hydropotes inermis inermis
Mustelids (Mustelidae)	
Stoat	Mustela erminea
Total	7

