Winter Weekender in Norfolk
26 - 28 January 2024

Highlights
Hawfinch, Crossbill, Bullfinch, Brambling, Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, Twite, Fieldfare, Redwing, Jay, Woodlark, Marsh Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Pink-footed Goose, Barnacle Goose, Common Scoter, Velvet Scoter, Red-throated Diver, Tawny Owl, Marsh Harrier & Red Kite,
Friday 26 January 2024 – Santon Downham, Weeting, Lakenheath & Lynford

I left home at 6.30am for the 3-hour drive to Santon Downham, a small village in Thetford Forest on the Norfolk/Suffolk border. Notable birds on-route included Red Kite, Common Buzzard and Kestrel.

As I approached the sandy car park on Santon Road, I could see a small flock of 15 Common Crossbill perched at the top of a tree … wow … what a great start! The red males glistened in the early morning sunshine. From the footbridge I took a short walk by the river and picked up Marsh Tit, Siskin, Greenfinch and Chaffinch. I retraced my route back to the car park and continued through the pine forest to the clearing. Here a Woodlark flew from the pine tops before I could get a photo. Turning left under the Santon Cattle Creep bridge, I followed the overgrown footpath to the Little Ouse river which was in full flow. A short walk added Jay, Green Woodpecker, Redwing, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, Woodpigeon and Mallard to my day list, but sadly no sign of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

Next stop was Weeting Heath, famous for its nesting Stone Curlews in spring/summer. Although the reserve was closed, access to the woodland hide is still possible via a small gate. Sadly, the woodland pool was dry and the feeders were empty, so other than Great Tit and Blue Tit there was little to see. On the breckland itself, I picked up Lapwing, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Jackdaw and Herring Gull. I crossed the road and drove up forest track #49 (opposite the farm) to the heath viewpoint. A short walk to the copse added Skylark, Wren, Rook, Pheasant and Lesser Redpoll.

At 12noon, I back-tracked and headed to nearby RSPB Lakenheath. Just before the reserve, I took Cowle’s Drive farm track, which on previous visits had produced Common Crane and Whooper Swan. Neither were showing today, but still nice to see Fieldfare and Starling in the horse paddocks, a huge flock of Lapwing and Black-headed Gull in the ploughed fields, and Collared Dove on the wires.

At Lakenheath itself, the wardens said the reserve was very quiet with no ‘notable’ sightings, a view shared by a visiting birder who had spent all morning there and seen “bugger all”. Thankfully, the feeders at the photography station were full, so I settled down for a couple of hours. The star here was a pair of Muntjac Deer feeding out in the open on the spilt seed, without a care in the world. Bird-wise, In addition to Blue Tit and Great Tit, the feeders pulled in Goldfinch, Long-tailed Tit, Reed Bunting and a fly-through Sparrowhawk. In the distance I heard Bittern ‘boom’, Water Rail ‘squeal’ and Cetti’s Warbler and Great Spotted Woodpecker call.

At 3pm it was time to move on to nearby Lynford Arboretum. From the car park I could see a group of birders had gathered just beyond the small catering van. As I approached, they shared their secret, pointing out a fabulous solitary Hawfinch feeding in the leaf litter – what a bird! As we watched, it was joined by a pair of Brambling and solitary Yellowhammer, Coal Tit and Nuthatch.

At 4pm the light was fading fast and the temperature dropping, so I returned to the car. On the drive to my accommodation at Yaxham Mill, East Dereham, I stopped briefly at the flooded meadows near MOD Bodney Camp, adding Greylag Goose, Egyptian Goose, Little Egret, Grey Heron and Feral Pigeon.

52 species at the end of a day that will go down in my memory as ‘Finch Fest’. The day also added 7 more ‘ticks’ to my UK Year List taking me to #126.
Reed Bunting

Blue Tit

Greenfinch

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Long-tailed Tit
Long-tailed Tit

www.bargainbirdingclub.com
Long-tailed Tit
Hawfinch
Day 2 of my 3-day birding long-weekender in Norfolk started at Holkham Deer Park, where a large herd of Fallow Deer were resting under the trees. Numerous Jackdaw and Jay were up early searching for a meal, as were a few Grey Squirrel. The lake held Coot, Moorhen, Greylag Geese, Egyptian Geese and Mute Swan.

I parked on Lady Anne’s Drive, Holkham just after 8am. The wet meadows either side of the drive were teeming with Curlew, Redshank, Wigeon, Teal, Gadwall, Mallard, Shoveler and Shelduck, which attracted the attention of a hawking Marsh Harrier.

The long walk through the pines, across the mudflats, over the dunes and on to Holkham Beach, produced large fly-over flocks of Pink-footed Geese and Cormorant. Sanderling flew along the shoreline but didn’t stop. On the sea itself, I could see a huge mixed flock, several hundred strong, of Common Scoter and Velvet Scoter, the latter revealing their diagnostic white wing patches as they glided over the sea. A large black blob proved difficult to identify through the bins, so I approached a friendly group of birders from South Wales, all armed with scopes. The ‘blob’ was originally thought to be a solitary Surf Scoter, but my poor photo later identified it as a Common Scoter. With many eyes (and scopes) now scanning the horizon, we also picked up Red-throated Diver and Gannet.

Sadly, no sign of the Shirelark flock, so I bid farewell and headed back to the tree line and made for the Washington Hide, surprised to find it empty. I could make out distant Greylags, but no sign of any Canada, Barnacle or White-fronted Geese, or Great White Egret. A walk back to the car only added Tufted Duck on the small freshwater pond to the trip list.

At 11am I headed to North Point Pools. The path was very muddy (note to self: should have brought my wellies). The flooded meadows held Common Gull, Brent Geese, Greylag Goose, Egyptian Goose, Little Egret, Teal, Wigeon and Mallard, and I also flushed a pair of Grey Partridge.

I was originally planning to visit nearby Garden Drove (aka: Warham Cow Field) - left out of North Point and first left down a farm track. Previous visits here had produced Pallid Harrier, Hen Harrier, Merlin and Barn Owl. However, it is a very, very muddy track to the viewing area, too muddy for cars at times, let alone my walking boots, so I gave it a miss.

Instead, I headed for Morston Quay, as the roving Red-breasted Goose had been reported there this morning. Sadly, if it was there, I couldn’t locate it amongst the Brent Geese, Wigeon and Teal. I did manage to add Grey Plover, Oystercatcher and Greenshank to the trip list though.

Next stop was Cley. I parked at the far end and walked the East Bank to the hide and back, picking up Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit and Pintail. I then drove round to the West Bank and walked to the beach car park and back. Still no sign of the Red-breasted Goose or the Ruddy Shelduck, but I did manage to locate the flock of c.20 flighty Twite, and a friendly Cley volunteer warden pointed out 3 Barnacle Geese amongst the hundreds of Pink-footed Geese and Greylag Geese.

At the end of day 2, my trip list now sat at 87 species, and I even managed to add 7 new ‘ticks’ to my UK Year List, which was now up to a credible #132.
Fallow Deer
Jackdaw

Grey Squirrel

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Rock Pipit

Greenshank

Common Scoter

Redshank

Morston Quay
Sunday 28 January 2024 – Sculthorpe Moor Hawk & Owl Trust Reserve.

Day 3 of my 3-day birding long-weekender in Norfolk was spent at Sculthorpe Moor.

This fabulous reserve has recently re-opened after being flooded in early January. Star species here include Tawny Owl, Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Siskin, Marsh Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Happy to report I managed to connect with them all during my 4-hour visit.

The final bird count on this 3-day trip was #94 species, and this boosted my UK Year List up to a respectable #134 species by the end of the first month.

Bullfinch (female)
Bullfinch & Brambling

www.bargainbirdingclub.com
Long-tailed Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Long-tailed Tit

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Siskin

Robin

Nuthatch
Wren
Blackbird

Grey Squirrel
Tawny Owl

www.bargainbirdingclub.com
Norfolk Winter Weekender: 26-28 January 2024 (94 species)

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**Mammals**

| Roe Deer | Muntjac Deer | Fallow Deer | Brown Hare | Grey Squirrel |

Keeping in touch with Bargain Birding Club

See our [website](http://www.bargainbirdingclub.com) for future trips and previous trip reports. Follow us on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com) for the latest news and sightings. Contact us: [info@bargainbirdingclub.com](mailto:info@bargainbirdingclub.com) 07785 707 797.