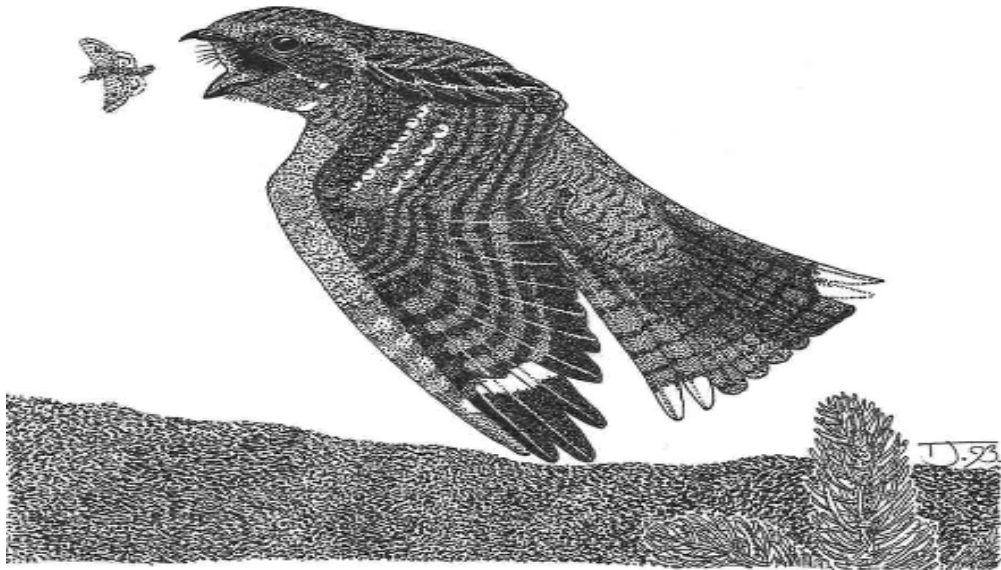


“No Sleep till Kings-Lynn”

Birding East Anglia – June 2017

(Paul Stewart, Chris & Graham Knox, Paul Cassells, Tony James)



This trip involved 4 long term birders and a relative newbie, all at an age where we now enjoy a bit comfort with our birding and our accommodation in Wells next the Sea was certainly that, more of that later. However in order to maximize birding we made a decision to step out of this comfort zone , turn back the clock, and spend our first night “attempting” to sleep in the car- a bad idea at first, but one which ended in a wonderful birding experience.

We left Tyneside around mid-day on Thursday 1st June, and arrived at Blacktoft RSPB in warm sunshine but no sign of our target bird, a summering Montagu's Harrier, it had been seen early on and locals informed us that the evening was the next best window to connect.



As we “thought” we had a bona fide site in Norfolk this news was therefore met with a shrug. Cetti's Warblers abound with at least a handful still in full explosive song and we even managed half decent views of one, why are they so skulking in the UK compared to e.g. Spain where they are always on show ?, we counted 20 + Avocet with chicks and several Marsh Harrier showed well.

We arrived in Lincolnshire on time, and a few hours' walk around Whisby Nature Park (Post Code – LN6 9BW) saw us add Turtle Dove and Egyptian Goose among others, this is a reliable site for Nightingale though information suggests that numbers are reduced this year with only 5 territories on the reserve. Despite having pin point directions to where birds had been singing, no joy, we suggested 19.00 may be a tadge early in the day and indeed information obtained on site suggested early morning best. Garden Warblers seemed common here with a handful of birds noted singing, we noted several Spotted Fly's and as we departed we realised it was a schoolboy error not to change out of our summer plumage of shorts and Tees, we were all badly bitten by critters.



Next stop Waterwell Lane near Ancaster, (NG2 3RF) we arrived an hour before sunset and soon located 2 jangling Corn Buntings showing well on the hedgerows adjacent to barley fields, we were surprised to see several Yellow Wagtails here, Red Legged Chickens called in the background and there were many Hirundines in the area. This area we were informed holds good numbers of this decling Bunting during the winter. A wonderful evening!



Next stop was Grantham and spirits rose as we googled our hoped for Fish and Chip stop, no luck closed at 8pm, we all blamed Thatcher who was born in this market town, and settled for burgers at KFC, though one of the group wished he hadn't gone for the extra spicy option !

We arrived in Cambridgeshire in the dark and followed directions to our Corncrake site, having passed what must have been the biggest mansion in the county, we came to a dead end only to be confronted by headlights and a quizzical owner of the mansion. A 10 minute "reassurance" conversation ensued and we were given an alternative area for *Crex Crex*. We arrived at a bridge near a water meadow and walked in the direction as instructed, no luck, silence.

We were tired, niggly and increasingly frustrated and returned to the car to consult maps. We made a democratic decision to tour a series of farm tracks about a mile away from our supplied information, windows down on a warm evening produced singing Sedge , Reed Warblers and a couple of Barn Owls and then bingo. We spent the next 30 minutes in silence listening to at least 4 Corncrakes rasping away from nearby meadows, difficult to judge but the birds didn't seem too far away at all.

Arriving at Roydon Common NR (PE32 1AQ), at 01.00 hours we parked up in the main car park for a few hours' sleep – impossible, 5 grown men in a car and everything that goes with it, accentuated by the aftermath of the Grantham "spice fest" earlier – hilarious.

We crawled out into the "fresh" air at 03.15 and were immediately surrounded by churring Nightjars, out onto the heath and from 03.30 – 04.10 we experienced some exceptional views of at least 5 birds, and these weren't birds disappearing into an increasing darkness as we usually see them back in Northumberland. The birds came within metres of us, illuminated by the increasing light, constantly calling a soft "Coohwick", wing clapping and showing incredible agility as male and female chased each other, and then silence as one by one they went to roost. We all agreed that this was a better time to get good views of this enigmatic species. First light also brought drumming Snipe, several roding Woodcock, calling Curlews and Grey Partridges, we briefly looked for a Nightingale at a nearby site without joy and failed to hear Woodlark here.

A half hearted tour of the Wolferton Triangle (PE31 6HA) failed with Golden Pheasant but we did hear Green Woodpecker and had observed several Barn Owls on our drive from Roydon. First stop in what was to become our Monty's challenge was the area between North & South Creak which we'd been told was successful in 2015, an hour or so here produced a number of Red Kites, Buzzards and a Little Owl but not a sniff of our prize.



Those of us who had spent time in Norfolk in the 80's / 90's were surprised at the number of Red Kites seen during the weekend an obviously increasing species. We found what we thought was some good looking habitat nearby but no luck, we decided to visit this area several times over the next few days in the hope that we'd bump into the birds.....

We stepped out of the car at Chosely Barns (PE31 8PH) to a singing Corn Bunting, sadly as elsewhere, now a difficult species in Norfolk during the breeding season. By now we were all running on empty and drove down the hill to our much needed breakfast stop at the Deepdale Café, Burnham Deepdale. Welcome as it was breakfast keeled us, we were now tired but perked up as we approached Titchwell RSPB, PC attempted a half-hearted charm offensive at the visitor centre re: Monty's, we were told they were around but understandably no specifics were imparted, this was probably down to the staff "doing their job" or the fact that after nearly 24 hours on the go, we looked more like a group of "skunk abusers" rather than birders

A couple of hours at Titchwell produced the expected birds including Red Crested Pochard, Spoonbill, "booming" Bittern, a late Merlin, Little Gull, Cetti's, Bearded Tits, and CGK worked on a possible *Continental* Black-tailed Godwit among a group of 50+ *islandica* (an adult was reported here next day !). A very showy Turtle Dove was welcome around the car park and as we departed the heavens opened, ironically this pleased us ,as we were heading for our digs and if rain stopped our birding for the day so be it- we needed to rest.





Our bed and breakfast in Wells next the Sea was super, and we had the run of the whole house, the host Kelly was good fun, attentive and showed great attention to detail recommended.

[Armeria Bed and Breakfast](#)

A seafood meal and few pints meant a sound sleep and Saturday 3rd saw us heading for a pre breakfast trip to Wiverton Downs LNR just south of Cley, where we again failed to hear Nightingale, but added Green Woodpecker and several Cuckoos, a species which appeared widespread in the county. Next stop a “quiet” Cley NWT; although we got in your face views of a wonderful male Bearded Tit, Wells Harbour added a late Brent Goose and several Common Gull.

After a substantial breakfast we drove an hour or so into Breckland where we had site information on the areas specialities. First stop was Maidcross Hill near Lakenheath (IP27 9EJ) where we heard at least two Nightingale in full voice and with patience eventually we all got decent views of one.



The RSPB reserve at Lakenheath produced the expected birds and a long and tiresome walk to the Joist Fen Viewpoint where we observed at least half a dozen Hobby and had a booming Bittern. A quick stop at Thetford Warren Club House car park (IP27 0AF) immediately produced 3 singing Woodlark and we then arrived at Weeting Heath armed with gen that the Stone Curlews weren't on the reserve.

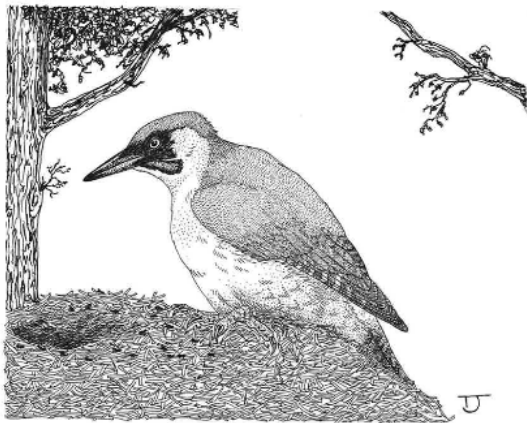
We made a contribution in order to park and after an hours wait we eventually got decent views of a pair on the other side of the road from the car park, we also saw

Marsh Tit here whilst unsuccessfully trying to locate a breeding pair of Firecrest, and were told that there are now no Willow Tits in Norfolk!.

The good weather continued and it was hot when we reached Santon Downham, (IP27 0TG) wrong time of year and wrong time of day for Lesser Pecker, but a very pretty valley and pair of Mandarin with young, Grey Wagtail and Siskins was added to our trip list.



Having failed on a brief stop at Wolferton our next stop in the Brecks was Euston Grange Farm (1P24 2QW) a Golden Pheasant site but again after 30 minutes or so we gave up, several Marsh Tit were calling here.



Late afternoon saw us at Potter Heigham, and we walked out onto the Weavers Way hoping to see the Savi's Warbler (NR29 5LW) that had been resident here for a while now, phone calls were made as we were unsure of the exact spot, regardless the bird failed to show, 5 Spoonbill and yet another yaffling Green Woodpecker were scant compensation.

Saturday evening started with a brilliant Curry in Sheringham then a few beers watching Ronaldo win the Champions League back at our digs.

[Labone Indians Sheringham](#)

Our early stop on Sunday was Kelling Heath (NR25 7EF), where we had been given directions to a good area for Dartford Warbler, several local birders were out and

about and therefore we quickly obtained smashing views of 2 singing males, a Grasshopper Warbler was reeling nearby.



Next Titchwell and another failed charm offensive for information about Monty's, although we obtained further views of Turtle Dove and the Little Gull continued to show well.



After lunch we decided on a big effort for Monty's and to follow our hunch and concentrate on the area we thought looked good, this was based on historically observing breeding pairs near Oil Seed Rape Fields. We ditched the car and headed out on foot and after an hour or so adding little more than Lesser Whitethroat we were resigned to giving up and heading back home. Then by pure luck as we headed back to the car we (literally) stumbled across a majestic male Monty's

floating over a barley field, it gave us a 10 minute show and then it was gone, high fives all-round and just reward for a great group effort and guess what the adjacent field was - Oil seed Rape !!!

A quick check of social media revealed nothing worthy of a detour on our way home so we pointed the car north with a stop in Wetherby for “whale and Chips” at its reputable fish restaurant.



Day trips aside it had been a while since any of us had spent time in Norfolk, and we came to the conclusion that it's still a super county to bird, we saw as a group about 125 species, and despite being a bit late in the Spring we managed to get decent views of most of the birds we had hope for.

We noticed a few changes too, we had no information or news on Honey Buzzard, Willow Tits and Golden Orioles are now gone, Corn Bunting and Nightingales are difficult and we will need to visit earlier for the never easy Lesser Pecker.

Saying that Red Kites were widespread, Marsh Harrier were often seen away their coastal reed beds haunts, Little Egrets and Spoonbills now common place, and we believe several pair of Monty's cling on. We didn't have neither the energy for Cranes, nor the breeding Black-Winged Stilts but suffice to say we are already planning a return in 2018.

Chris Knox; June 2017.

(Art work provided by Tony James & Photographs Paul Cassells / Chris Knox)