

Norfolk Trip – May 2019

Knowing that we weren't going to Norfolk in Autumn I started to investigate when would be best time to fit it into our holiday plans. April looked like the best month for the migrating Ring Ouzels and Wrynecks but when I tried to book the boat I was gutted to see that, in the only week we could get off, the Ben was in dry dock.....Nooooooo! This scuppered all my plans, and it wasn't back in action until the first week in May, which pushed us close to TT time but luckily it seemed we could sneak a week in just before the TT rush. It meant we would be too late for the best spring migration time but it was better than nothing so I just had to go ahead and book it and hope for the best.....Eek! Next up was finding a cottage. Cottages seem to be getting harder and harder to book especially in Norfolk. All the ones I had bookmarked are either sold or not let out anymore and the ones that remain have all rocketed in price 😞. Luckily for us, there was a cottage that we'd stayed at before that we liked that was available, so I quickly booked it up even though the price had gone up.

Friday 3rd May

It was a lovely still start to the day but, as per usual the wind was forecast to pick up just in time for our sailing. Unbelievable! I worked through my lunch to get out early, so had enough time to have my tea before I left the house. I wasn't going to risk room service on the boat after it failed to materialise last time. We were ready in good time and when we arrived at the Sea Terminal at 6.57pm we were relieved that the wind was still very slight and nothing like what we had been expecting...Phew! Apart from the usual **Herring Gulls** flying around there were no birds around even after a scan of Douglas Head with our bins. As we boarded at 7.11pm a flock of **Goldfinches** flew over and after I had got the key, we let ourselves into the cabin at 7.15pm. Lyca made herself at home straight away on the bed, so Wendy had to arrange the blankets around her. Wendy unpacked her drink from the rucksack and I realised that I didn't have anything. Wendy being nice and brave decided she would go to the shop for me and miraculously didn't get lost on the way back :P. We set off at 7.36pm, which was early and we could see **Gannets** flying out to sea. We waited for the boat to get a bit further out and went out onto the deck to see if we would be lucky enough to spot any Manxies or Dolphins, but it was absolutely dead.



Bye bye IOM!

We went back in and settled down to watch TV and Wendy went to sleep until she was woken up by the announcement that we had arrived, really early, at 10.55pm :). This would be a great help to get to Sleaford Travelodge at a reasonable time before we got too tired. We had to stand in a queue before they opened the car decks and unfortunately there were 2 dogs in front of us, so Lyca was a bit narky. Wendy got talking to the woman and stupidly bent down to stroke her Poodle, which made Lyca very jealous. How embarrassing! We were the 1st car to go from the upper deck and the roads were lovely and quiet as we set off at 11.06pm, possibly the earliest time we have ever left the evening boat. Lyca was puffing and panting in the back but she was probably tired and wanted to get on Wendy's knee. Nevertheless, it was distracting knowing that she wasn't happy but there wasn't much we could do about it, although she does seem to calm down the faster I go! We passed a sign warning us that there was salt spreading in progress, which was a bit of a surprise, but the temperature did fall to 3.5c as we crossed west to east over the Pennines.

Saturday 4th May

The roads were so quiet, just how I like them, until we got behind a car that was swerving all over the place. Neither of us had ever seen anything quite as bad before, so we were a bit worried that the driver was very drunk. All I knew was that I needed to get past and well away from them before there was an accident. Luckily I grabbed the first opportunity I got to overtake, but as I sighed in relief I saw the flash of a speed camera go off.....Urrghhhhh! As usual we kept our eyes peeled for a Barn Owl or Fox but there was no wildlife at all, until we saw some **Rabbits** on the grass verge and a dead Deer that had been recently hit by a lorry or something :(.

It was 1.51am when I pulled up outside the Travelodge in Sleaford and Wendy took Lyca over to the grass for a wee while I lugged all our stuff across the car park. It was absolutely freezing and after ringing the bell we found ourselves standing at the door for ages with nobody coming to let us in. Typical when we had got here at our earliest ever. Grrrr. There was a phone number to ring in such an event, so I phoned it and finally a bloke came and opened the door for us. While we were at the desk waiting for the key Wendy clocked a black cat lounging around on one of the chairs in reception. The woman who gave us the key was laughing at Lyca, who was up on her back legs dancing and blissfully unaware of the cat. Luckily she didn't spot it at all and trotted straight past and through the door leading to the rooms....phew! This was not only very amusing but also a great relief, as she probably would've woken the entire Hotel up if she had seen it. It was chilly in the room, so I cranked up the heating so it could warm up while we did our teeth and got changed. The first thing was to get Lyca some water, which she guzzled in no time and then needed a top up! She jumped on the bed and got comfy while we got ready and in no time at all we were all fast asleep.

Lyca tried her hardest to get us up at 7.30am but I managed to get her back to sleep for an hour. By 8.30am she couldn't wait any longer and although we were really tired, she was raring to go outside to explore and have a good sniff. I took her out, while Wendy refilled her water bowl and got her breakfast ready and again, she failed to see the cat sprawled across the reception desk :P. As I walked her around, I heard a **Skylark** singing and there were loads of **House Sparrows** hanging around the building. Back at the room Lyca scoffed her breakfast then jumped back on the bed and had a nap!!



Ridiculous

At 9.20am Wendy went to see if she could get us some breakfast. There used to be a Little Chef next door where she could get Linda McCartney sausage baps from but this had been replaced by a Burger King and KFC.....Uh oh! She wasn't hopeful that she would be able to get anything and to make matters worse they were both closed until 10am. As we had no plan of what to do on the way down at this time of year I had been busy online trying to find us somewhere to walk Lyca. Not the best planning but I had assumed we were too early for interesting Butterflies and too late for migrating birds....doh. The weather forecast was also rubbish so I was having to look more west than east. By a stroke of luck I found a butterfly conservation site in Cambridgeshire, where it looked like there could be a window of an hour without rain. This was called Twyford Wood, which had been created on an RAF WW2 airfield. Someone had recently reported 1x Grizzled and 1x Dingy Skipper there, which sparked my interest as they were both lifers. I didn't think we stood a chance of them, as I thought we were too early in the year, so weather permitting it sounded worth a go even if it meant driving away from our actual destination. Wendy went back down to see if she could get us some breakfast at 10am but there was still no sign of them opening and after standing outside for a while she came back in to see what we were going to do. We packed up our stuff and got ready to leave but Wendy wanted to hang around until we had eaten. We didn't have time for that though, so she reluctantly left the room at 10.25am, which was already later than I had hoped. When we got into the car, we noticed that there were people going into BK, so Wendy went in to try again. She was told there was a 5 minute wait, which was fine and ordered me a crispy chicken burger and spicy bean burger for herself, which wasn't exactly breakfast material, but better than nothing. We ate our weird breakfast in the car, adding **Starling** to our list and noticing that it was really windy, which wasn't what we needed if we were to see any Butterflies.

Just to add insult to injury, it was raining and only 8.5c when we headed off at 10.51am, so Wendy reckoned we should just drive straight to the cottage. I reminded her that we weren't allowed in until 5pm anyway, so there would be no point and that the weather was worse on the north Norfolk coast.....Doh! I carried on with my plan ever hopeful that we would be able to dodge the rain and added **Magpie, Feral Pigeon, Buzzard, Rook, Woodpigeon, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Jackdaw, Mistle Thrush** and **Carrion Crow** on the way. I took the backroad route to avoid the A1 and when we got to a place called Burton-le-Coggles we

spotted something in the road ahead of us, so I slowed down. At first it didn't move but suddenly it flew clumsily to the bushes at the side of the road revealing itself as a baby **Robin** that must've only recently fledged, as it only had a vague suggestion of a tail and could hardly fly. We were glad we had been first on the scene and just hope it stopped hanging around in the middle of the road before a car hit it :(There was an **Orange Tip Butterfly** in the verge so at least butterflies were on the wing, then we spotted some **House Martins** over a field and finally arrived at Twyford Wood car park at 11.30am.

The first thing we saw was a sign saying that cars would be seized if they looked suspicious, which wasn't a very warm welcome. We wondered if we had yet again accidentally found another dogging spot, but as it was daytime, I reckoned we would be fine. There was another car in the car park with 3x dogs running around off their leads, so we waited for them to go before we got Lyca out. As we got our stuff together, we heard a **Wren** and **Dunnock** singing and we followed the path into a woodland hearing a **Blackcap**.



Lots of trees for an ex airfield

The path was absolutely caked in dog poo, which was gross and instead of enjoying our surroundings we were too busy watching where we stood.....Grrrrrr! Lyca had a bark at a Staffie, which luckily trotted past totally ignoring her but was then fine with 3x dogs that were all off the lead. We picked up the calls of **Chiffchaff**, **Nuthatch**, **Bullfinch**, **Goldcrest** and **Great Tit** before getting a bit lost. I checked the map on my phone and saw that there was a huge twitch 10 miles away for a Baikal Teal. It seemed a bit out of the way for a bird that was probably an escape anyway and when I told Wendy, she instantly said, "No!" so that was that. Wendy stopped to get me to take photos of what she thought were Bugle and Cowslips and seeing as we've always needed to find Bugle flowers, but had always been away before they flowered, they were worth IDing. The path came out onto what was once the runway of the airfield, which had been taken over by various plants and bushes.



Lots of regeneration in 70 years!

It was a strange place and nothing like what we had expected and there was still nothing to give away the whereabouts of the Butterfly Sanctuary. We got to a nice sheltered glade area, which felt nice and warm and if I was a Butterfly is where I would be. We could hear a **Blackcap** singing but all of a sudden some big black clouds came rolling in, which hadn't been forecast. A bit further we finally spotted the information board for Twyford Butterfly Sanctuary and there were 2 blokes walking with their eyes to the ground aha!



Not easy to find!

I looked at the photo of the Dingy Skipper from the day before and noticed that it was on a yellow flower, which looked like a Cowslip. This gave us some clue as to where to look, otherwise we wouldn't have known where to start but the other blokes didn't look happy as they walked past us, still looking at the ground. Things weren't looking hopeful, but Lyca needed a walk, it wasn't raining and it was a new location for us, so it wasn't a complete waste of time. We kept going and found Bugle that was growing on the ground, so wondered if we

had gone too far. We had got to the end of the path of the reserve by then and I spotted a **Bee Fly** feeding on the bugle, which isn't something we see often at home, so I had to try to get some video and shots. When I looked back at the photos I was gutted to see that they were all out of focus. To add insult to injury it then started to chuck it down and every insect around vanished.....Grrrrr! A **Siskin** flew over, probably heading for the shelter of the trees, so we decided to do the same until the rain stopped.



Chucking it down!!

We stood under the trees and they did a great job of keeping us dry unlike the rather damp **Pheasant** that hurriedly ran across the path. All of a sudden, the temperature dropped and there was a really heavy hail storm, but I was certain it wasn't going to last long. Wendy and Lyca were starting to get a bit bored by then and Wendy was all for giving up. I was having none of it though and wanted to at least get some decent shots or, if possible, video of the Bee Fly if it came back. Luckily it was as I predicted a brief hiccup and the sun came out again when it had passed over. We went for a wander, backtracking the way we had come but I went off on a tangent to check out a field on the other side of the path to see if I could find anything. Apart from a **Speckled Wood Butterfly** warming itself and a weird fly which we didn't know what it was there was nothing else.



Weird but funky fly

We went back to where we had seen the 2 blokes looking for a second look. Again, there was nothing and this time it was much windier and felt noticeably colder, so we started to give up hope. I thought we may as well have a last wander back to the end again, seeing as we had nothing to lose or anywhere else to go. We heard some **Long-tailed Tits** flitting through the bushes and a **Kestrel** and **Jay** flew over as we headed back. We heard a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** calling too and luckily, we didn't have to wait too long until the Bee fly came out again to feed on the Bugle. I handed Lyca over to Wendy and started to video it, which wasn't easy at all I can tell you! While I was engrossed, I heard Wendy breathe in sharply, which made me look up only to find her looking down at the ground and pointing with a look of pure shock on her face. As I scanned the ground, she just about managed to spit the word, "Skipper!" out and I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw a **Grizzled Skipper** Butterfly feeding on a flower just in front of us! I knew I would have to get a photo quickly before it flew off, so obviously my attention turned to that and the Bee fly took a back seat! It was surprisingly obliging and although it moved between flowers, I was able to follow it and get both photos and some video.



Grizzled Skipper

When we came away we never thought we would be getting a lifer Butterfly on our first day and if it hadn't been raining everywhere the chances of me researching somewhere to go whilst at the Travelodge were highly unlikely. It was just lucky that I had stumbled across Twyford Wood and if the Burger King had been open earlier we would have been there at different time and might not have seen the Butterfly. Nothing lasts forever and when the sun went behind some clouds the Grizzled Skipper flew up into the hawthorn and vanished. Very happy with our lifer we decided to head back and get going before the weather got any worse. As we walked back through the Woods Wendy heard a bird calling that neither of us recognised. We stopped and could see some kind of Tit up in the branches of a tree, which revealed itself as a **Marsh Tit**. There were 2 of them but no wonder we didn't recognise the call, it's a bird we hardly ever see! It was getting really windy and cold again and we made it back to the car just in time before another hailstorm came in.....Phew! This type of weather wasn't something we had bargained on in May and we hoped that it wasn't a sign of things to come. A **Pied Wagtail** flew into the car park and I looked at the time and saw that I had better phone the cottage company up about getting our key. I thought the office closed at 4pm on a Saturday and we would be arriving too late, so I had already agreed to phone them to arrange alternative arrangements if need be. Luckily, they didn't close until 5pm, so we would be able to pop into the office after all to get the key.

I drove off at 1.50pm and with there being no dog bins, hence the dog poo everywhere probably, we had had to take our bag with us. The car wasn't exactly what I would describe as fragrant but at least our consciences were clear. Driving through Bourne, which was unexpectedly big, we spotted some **Swallows** feeding over a field as well as some **Black-headed Gulls**. Next, we had 2 **Mallards** and a **Moorhen** in a ditch at the side of the road and when we got to the River Welland, we found 2 **Shelducks**. Sutton Bridge was, as always, a welcome sight and we spotted a **Green Woodpecker** as it flew between some trees. It was 2.54pm when we finally entered Norfolk and we saw our first **Collared Dove** of the trip.

Having delayed arriving in Norfolk for as long as possible due to the bad weather I felt a bit annoyed when I noticed that it didn't look as though it had rained at all at King's Lynn. Wendy reminded me that if we hadn't then we wouldn't have seen Grizzled Skipper, so I had to agree that we had made the right decision. The next bird we saw was **Lesser Black-backed Gull** and at 3.11pm we started to feel tired and couldn't wait to get to our cottage. Hopefully Jesmond was as good as we remembered it and that we would be able to use the downstairs bedroom this time. Last time it smelt like a combination of smelly old birder and Indian restaurant, which we didn't really think would be very nice to sleep with. The wind was so strong that a **Meadow Pipit** nearly got blown into the road but luckily, it crash landed in the verge, so it was safe. Wendy found a tiny caterpillar on her rucksack, so I pulled over so that she could put it on some bushes. When we got to Blakeney I stopped at the Spa and Wendy went in to pick me up a pizza for tea and then we headed over to the cottage company for the key. It was cold and surprisingly busy on Blakeney Quay and driving along the road past Cley Marshes we saw a **Marsh Harrier** floating over the reeds. There was a very smart Cockerpool like Lyca trotting up the road in Cley and I managed to remember which driveway was ours, but had forgotten how nightmarishly hard it was to turn into off the road.

I pulled up outside Jesmond at 4.16pm and we breathed a sigh of relief to have finally arrived.



Jesmond

Wendy took Lyca in first to see if she remembered it and she did her usual thing of going into the kitchen and licking her lips to ask for a drink. It was exactly how we remembered it and just as clean and tidy as the first time we stayed there, so next we went to check the bedroom. Unbelievably, it still smelled the same although nowhere near as bad, so we decided that it would be fine. There was a baby Robin in the garden, not much bigger than the one we had seen in the road earlier as well as a Song Thrush and Blackbird. Wendy started to unpack our stuff, while the oven heated up for my pizza and when it was done she put her fancy Spanish style soup the microwave. After a very nice and quick tea she went for a bath and then joined Lyca on the bed. I decided to go out for a bit before our Tesco delivery, so I asked if there was anything else that we needed. Wendy checked the utility room and found that there was no washing powder, so I made a mental note to get some and headed out at 6pm.

I decided to go and have a look at Friary hills to see if I could find a late Ring Ouzel or some Bearded Tits but when I got there it was raining. I could see a Marsh Harrier hunting right over the path and crossed my fingers it would still be there if I waited for the rain to pass. Typically, by the time it stopped raining the harrier had gone and there was nothing exciting on the path and only a few new things for the trip list. **Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Linnet, Stock Dove, Shoveler and Curlew.** The wind was starting to pick up and I could see more rain coming so I decided to drive away from the rain and go look at the new hide that looked over the new Cley marsh extension. We had donated to the fund raiser for them to buy that side of the marsh, so I felt like we owned at least a splinter of the hide.....hehe. We are also Norfolk wildlife trust members so are allowed to access their reserves anyway :). On the path out there I added **Lapwing, Greylag, Canada goose, Black-tailed Godwit and Pochard.** About 200m from the hide the rain caught up with me and it chucked it down, so I had to full on sprint to try and not get soaked through and my camera isn't waterproof either! :O I had the hide to myself, so sat down and took a breather and had to take my glasses off as I couldn't see anything through them, then opened the blind. Directly outside the hide was 3 sleeping **Spoonbill!** Ace! I took loads of video and got some pics. They didn't look too pleased with the cold weather though.



Grumpy Spoonbill

Also on the scrape was **Avocet, Gadwall, Great Black-backed Gull** and a **Mute Swan** on a nest. It was a pretty decent scrape really, so I will definitely revisit it in the future. After filling my boots, I headed back and yet again could see more rain coming so I ran $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way back which was a bit far with all my gear. When I got back to my car I actually felt sick....Hahahahaha.

I got back at 7.40pm and Wendy said that there were 4x baby Robins, 2x baby Song Thrushes and 1x baby Blackbird in the garden, which was pretty good going. Although it wasn't quite the same as having Crestie, Red Squirrel, Pine Marten and Badger on our doorstep they would

be interesting to watch over the week. Lyca had only decided to get up and join Wendy in the living room at 7.25pm, so even she must've been tired!

We had done 14,334 steps when we had arrived at HQ, so I had no idea how many I ended up on after my outing. Tesco came at 8.40pm and typically my guts decided to play up just before they arrived. Wendy saw the van drive past and had to shout me to go out to the Tesco man to get the bags in, while she took Lyca into the kid's bedroom. We finally sat down to relax after a long but eventful day but there was nothing decent on TV. Wendy tried to get the log burner going but as we only had kindling and newspaper it burned out pretty quickly. We started to feel brain dead, so decided that enough was enough and headed off to bed at 10.15pm.

Sunday 5th May

Because there were no curtains, just blinds, on the big window in the bedroom the light was streaming into the bedroom at stupid o'clock. This meant that Lyca thought it was time to get up at 6.45am when we wanted to have a lie in to recover from yesterday....Urrghhhh! I got so fed up that I got up and took her outside but didn't give her any breakfast, so she went straight back to bed. I stayed up but Wendy managed to sleep in until 9.20am, so it was alright for some! When Lyca got up she sat by the back door watching the **Grey Squirrel** and baby Robins running around on the lawn.



Lyca wildlife spotting

There had been a Great-Spotted Cuckoo reported from the Muckleborough Hill area for the past 6 days and a Purple Heron down the footpath at Burnham Overby, so we decided that the Cuckoo would be first to attempt, although both would be lifers. Wendy made our sarnies and after we had breakfast we were ready so left at 10.55am. We had struggled to decide what to wear and going outside only to find it quite chilly but very warm in sheltered spots just confused us even more. Driving through Salhouse we saw some **Egyptian Geese** in the fields and I got a parking space easily by the Deli. Lyca was bursting with excitement and being very vocal in the back, so if anyone could've heard her, they would probably have thought that she was being tortured! Even though we wanted to try for the cuckoo we decided to incorporate it with a nice walk from Salhouse rather than parking up by

Muckleborough Hill. There were some noisy Oystercatchers flying around when we set off at 11.10am and I spotted a Spoonbill flying over the Marshes and wondered if it one of the ones I had seen last night going back to the scrape. There were loads of Greylag Geese and 2x Lapwing in the field to our left and as we walked past the Duck pond, we noticed a **Tufted Duck** amongst the Gulls. We also noticed that, for the first time since we had started visiting Norfolk, the Horse wasn't there and we didn't see any sign of it during the rest of the week either :(. The road wasn't too busy as we walked along the narrow verge and down in the ditch was a Mute Swan with some Cygnets.



Mute swan

We heard a **Dunnock** and then a **Sedge Warbler** singing from the reeds just before we got onto Meadow Lane. The bushes still hadn't grown back from last year's scalping, but the reeds were teeming with birds including the usual **Reed Buntings**. A well-known photographer walked past us presumably on his way back from Muckleborough Hill, but going by his rather glum body language, there was nothing to suggest that his efforts had payed off. Obviously, seeing a happy birder is a rarity in itself but it would just be our luck if the bird had decided to clear off, now we were there....Hahaha! I found a **Bar-tailed Godwit** in a field with some Blackwits and scanning around we watched some Skylarks having a scuffle and added **Grey Heron** and **Whimbrel** to our list. Wendy stopped at a gate to get a photo of the area, so when I spotted a **Brown Hare** I took the opportunity to get some video of it.



Dressed for winter!

When we got to Kelling Water Meadows we could see loads of **Sand Martins** feeding over the pool and some **Teal** and scanning the hill on the far side we found 12 Brown Hares and an unbelievable amount of Wood Pigeons.



Sand Martin

There was no point wasting any more time, as we had the small issue of a lifer to pursue, not that I had any reports of it yet, but we carried on anyway. On this Salhouse – Kelling - Weybourne loop walk, we normally would start walking back via the beach at this point but we needed to keep going towards Muckleborough Hill and we heard, then saw a **Stonechat**. Finally, I got the report we had been hoping for all morning and the GS Cuckoo had just been seen at Weybourne Camp and was viewable from the pine trees on the coastal path....Phew! It didn't seem to be much further either and when we spotted 3x birders standing around we

started to feel a bit more hopeful. We went over to stand with them, but it wasn't long before we had found out that none of them had seen it, which instantly put a stop to any feelings of optimism. The area we were looking at was densely covered by long grass and brambles with a fence running alongside it and a ridge behind it, which looked good for a Cuckoo.



Looks good

Wendy was starting to get bored (as usual!) but as I was scanning the fenceline for the hundredth time I caught a fleeting glimpse of a Cuckoo shaped bird that flew up into view before disappearing behind the ridge again. Grrrrrrr! I was pretty sure it was a Cuckoo of some description, but didn't get to see any other details. This had to be the only occasion when I wouldn't class a Common Cuckoo as a special sighting and it felt strange to be so dismissive, but it didn't show again, so I hoped it wasn't the Great Spotted Cuckoo! I got a lot of questions from the other birders and the best I could say was it was definitely a cuckoo sized bird acting like a cuckoo. This increased the excitement a bit and whenever anyone turned up the other birders referenced what I had seen 😊. I found out later no Common Cuckoos had been seen in that area, only the Great spotted....Uh oh. A **Wall Brown Butterfly** flew past and at 1.20pm we decided to give up and we started to head back. Back at the radar station we found 2 **Grey Partridge**, which were an unexpected bonus and a **Wheatear** between Kelling and Gramborough Hill.

When we got to Gramborough Hill I had a moan that it was totally dead now we were there and how Penny Clarke had found a Cuckoo just sitting there in the open. Moments later we heard a **Cuckoo** calling and for a while we wondered if it was just a birder playing the call on their phone but luckily Wendy found the bird sitting in a gorse bush. I got some video but it was too deep to get any decent photos of it.



Cuckoo video grab

Back at Salthouse a **Ringed Plover** flew over with some **Dunlin** and we had a wander up to check out what work was being done at Eastgate Cottage, where we had stayed once. We knew that it was going to have flood defences built and all I can say is that it definitely needed it! The inside looked as though it had been totally gutted but the entire garden, that was full of flowers and wildlife had been too, so it was a sorry sight in comparison to what we knew.



Total destruction

We started to think that we might like to go back there after it had been done up but knowing our luck it'll be out of our price range or been bought as a private residency. Back at the car it was 2.30pm we were pretty hungry, so Wendy went into the Deli to get me some cake. She then went over to the Dun Cow to use the loos and said that it was absolutely heaving in there. We had done 8.03km and 13,500 steps, which had burnt off 900kcal, so we couldn't wait to have our lunch. I drove to the car park at East Bank but there were no spaces, so I carried on and parked up at Walsey Hills instead and we ate our sarnies with a view of the

pool. Reports of the Great-spotted Cuckoo started to come in and the NBC Group were claiming that, although they were miles up the hill from where we had been standing, it had been showing well at 12.30, when we had been there! Aarrghhhh! There was a **Little Grebe** on the pool but we started to feel really tired and could've easily had a Granny nap there and then but we fought it and prized ourselves out of the car for a walk down East Bank at 3.20pm.

We found a **Marsh Harrier** floating around over the reedbed but it didn't come anywhere near close enough for me to be able to video it, which was one of the reasons I wanted to go there. We could hear **Bearded Tits** but none of them were flying, so I couldn't get any video of them either, which was really disappointing. A single Spoonbill was feeding in one of the pools and we could hear a **Reed Warbler** and there were some **Sandwich Terns** flying about down by the shingle ridge but apart from that it was pretty quiet, so we headed back when we got to the end. Back at the car it was 3.57pm and I got another report of the Cuckoo having recently, "flown towards the beach car park" which we presumed was still at Weybourne. We really hoped that it wasn't Salthouse as I drove away from it and headed for Weybourne, that would be just our luck.....Hahaha!

It was 4.07pm when I parked up at Weybourne and straight away we spotted Penny Clarke pacing up and down by the row of conifers at the back. She's a well known local birder so maybe we had chosen the right beach car park. We went over and stood near her and were quickly joined by 3 more birders.



Weybourne

Whilst standing staring at the bushes I suddenly felt a jerk from my side and within a flash Lyca was bolting and snarling towards a dog that had sneaked up behind us that I hadn't seen! In a panic I grabbed the cord of the extending lead with my fingers as it was flying out which gave me a nasty rope burn on my hand....Ouch! I was very lucky it didn't wrap around my fingers as god knows what would have happened. Amazingly I managed to stop Lyca in her tracks and re-engaged the lock on the lead which must have been knocked off somehow.....Grrrr! The owners of the other dog looked mad at us, as did the other Birders including Penny Clarke, which was extremely embarrassing so we moved about 20 yards away from the other birders and looked from there instead.

There was no sign of anything and we stuck it out until 4.50pm when Penny phoned another birder and was told it had gone back to Muckleborough Hill but that info wasn't put out....Grrrrr! Luckily we knew the area it was in having twitched a Olive-backed Pipit in the vicinity a few years ago, so we all jumped in our cars and headed to Weynor Gardens Estate.

We were the first to arrive from the group and luckily there was a parking space (just about) on the end of a row of cars. It looked as though it was going to be busy at the twitch and we set off across the road and through the gate not knowing whether to feel optimistic or not. Wendy recognised the hill where we had seen the OBP and reckoned we should keep going alongside it, not up it. I wasn't so sure but luckily she was right and we finally found a group of birders standing in a field staring at some bushes that were absolutely miles off.....Urrghhh!



Those bushes on the horizon! LOL

While we walked through the trees we kept hearing what sounded like a Wood Warbler, which confused us until we realised it a Song Thrush impersonating one. Dog Staring Man was there and even spoke to Lyca about their past encounters, so we scuttled off and stood on the end next to a guy with a scope. We were told where to look but also that we didn't stand a chance of seeing it through our bins. One of the blokes nearest us said did we want to look through his scope as it was in view. Wendy went first and he gave her directions as to where it was, which didn't help her in the slightest. She just couldn't see the bird despite her best efforts, which I found really hard to understand. Eventually like one of those 3D 'magic eye' books the bird came into her view and she breathed a sigh of relief and then couldn't quite believe what she was seeing. I went next and very quickly realised that she wasn't the only one struggling to see it. I was being given directions but couldn't find it either, which was so frustrating but eventually it came into my view and we both added **Great-spotted Cuckoo** to our life list, which was a bird neither of us had bargained on seeing any time soon unless we went to Spain. We both had a side view of the bird and were happy enough to have seen enough of its features before we left. We could hear a **Lesser Whitethroat** from the bushes behind us but there was no point hanging around because without a scope we couldn't see the bird at all. Just for a laugh I pointed the camera at what bush I thought it was at and pressed record. Wendy asked me if I could see it, so I laughed

and said, “Nope.” Amazingly, I actually got the world’s longest distance record shot ever taken. Norris Mcwerter has sent me my Guinness World Record award to prove it.



Great-spotted Cuckoo (honest)

Before we left, Wendy realised she hadn’t got a photo of the twitch, but there was a dog heading our way, so we gave that up as a bad job. When we got back to the car, we realised how lucky we had been to have not given up and gone home when we were feeling tired after our lunch. I also realised that the section of bushes and trees it was in, was exactly where we were looking earlier but on the other side.

We parked up outside HQ 5.52pm and Lyca was so hungry that Wendy didn’t have time to cook her broccoli, but she wolfed her dinner down anyway. Wendy heated up the rest of the tin of soup she had brought and I had fresh pasta with seitan ragu, so tea was ready in a matter of minutes....Phew! After tea Wendy started to make her concoction to keep her going for the rest of the week and went for a bath while it was cooking. I went next and then settled down to look through the videos I had taken so far. Wendy saw a **Muntjac Deer** in the back garden, which luckily Lyca didn’t spot, so she must’ve been tired. She also reckoned that Lyca would like the beanbags and took her over to show her them. Lyca proceeded to clamber into one and then curled up and went to sleep looking very comfortable indeed.

We had done 20,277 steps over the day and if we hadn’t been tired enough after our lunch then we certainly were by 9.55pm, so knowing that we wanted to get out early tomorrow, we headed off to bed!

Monday 6th May

I had set the alarm for 7am but Lyca had other ideas and tried to get us up earlier.....Grrrrrr! I ignored her for as long as possible because I had been awake at 2am with my IBS, which I now know were stomach ulcers, so the early night hadn’t payed off at all and I felt pretty dreadful :(It suddenly occurred to me that it was a Bank Holiday, so from past experience I realised that everyone was going to be out walking their dogs with their families, so the walk I had planned was going to be hideously busy.....Nooooooooo! When we got into the living room Lyca spotted a Squirrel outside on the picnic table and in a moment of sheer madness she ran for it and crashed straight into the french doors with a “Thud!” Ouch! We were just a bit

worried but Lyca seemed absolutely unfazed by the whole thing. After the Squirrel had gone I took her out on her lead for a wee. After she had her breakfast she went back to window watching, while Wendy quickly made sarnies, cooked the cauliflower for Lycas tea and we both had breakfast and got ready. It was 8.45am when we were finally ready to go out and we heard a **Greenfinch** flying over as we got into the car. I stopped off at the poncy shop at Holkham for Wendy to pretend she was Lady Poncenby for 5 minutes. Flying over was a **Red Kite**. We still got to Burnham Overy layby at 9.13am so got there quick enough.

There were loads of cars there already and typically not a single report had come in, so we had no idea if the Purple Heron was still there.....Urrghhhh! We really hoped that it was because we reckoned it was time we actually saw one having dipped on a few in the past. It was 9.5c as we set off down the path and we found some birders scanning a field but there was no sign of anything. The bird was supposedly in one of the ditches that weaves through the fields, so it could've been anywhere. We started to get the impression that our chances of seeing it were pretty slim. There were loads of **Swifts** flying over the Dunes in the distance, so they had probably just arrived and were feeding up after their long journey. All we could hear was the sound of Sedgies, Whitethroats and then we heard a Lesser Whitethroat getting in on the act too as we carried on down the path seeing another nice Brown Hare in the field.



Brown Hare

As expected, the upper path was busy with dog walkers, but we stayed on the lower one in the ditch as usual and avoided them all. All of a sudden a runner came from out of nowhere and gave Lyca a bit of a fright, so she jumped up at him and he swore at us.....Oops! My instant reaction was to swear straight back at him. Hahaha, even though it was our fault :D . Wendy had Lyca and was too slow to stop her, so I reminded her to be more aware, which didn't go down very well. Hahahaha :P. We found a **Small Heath Butterfly** on the ground just before the path goes off to the right and a **Small Copper** a bit further on.



Small Copper

At 10.06am, my heart sank when I got a report of the Purple Heron at 9.57am from the first ditch we had looked at and just to add insult to injury it was apparently showing well occasionally.....Grrrrrr! Not for us it wasn't, which was just typical! We found a **Small White Butterfly** and **Cinnabar Moth** down by the ace bushes at the bottom but apart from there being Whitethroats and Sedgies everywhere there was nothing else.



We will find a rarity in these bushes one of these days!

As we turned right into the Dunes we spotted 2 **Wheatear**, some **Linnets** and a load of Meadow Pipits which we scoured through in the hope of something more interesting but ended up disappointed. We carried on and looked through even more Meadow Pipits until

stopping for a breather on top of a mound. Wendy ate a banana and then told me to be quiet while she meditated for a few minutes, which said it all about how eventful the morning had been :P.



Pete and Lyca keeping an eye out whilst Wendy was being a ponce

After our interlude we wandered over to the Pines and when I got another report of the Heron we quickly turned around to go back and give it a second go. We added **Peacock** and **Small Tortoiseshell** Butterflies to our list and heard the boom of a **Bittern** from somewhere deep in the reedbed.

A very stressed looking bloke with a scope was definitely on a mission, as he charged past us and headed down from where we had just come from. Did he know something that we didn't? Knowing our luck the bird had probably moved and we were now wasting our time going back up to the start of the walk. We could see some more birders viewing the fields and ditches from the village side of the sea wall path, so we didn't know what to do for the best. None of them looked as though they had it, so we decided to stick to our original plan and carried on back up the layby path until we found a group of birders. We tagged on to the end of the group (but at a distance due to someone else having a dog) and apparently the bird was showing but we couldn't see it for toffee. We were given great directions, but it was so well camouflaged against the orange-coloured long grass that it took ages to finally spot it. I found it first and could just about make out the head and neck of the **Purple Heron** right at the back of a ditch on the far side of the field in front of us. It was difficult to get Wendy onto it, but she got there in the end too.



Purple Heron twitch

Luckily, when it started to move it became more obvious and we both had ok enough views of it to be happy to add it as another lifer of the trip...Woo Hoo! Before we had gone away, we never thought we would have had any lifers, so 2 in 1 day was a cracking start to the week.

I got some video of it, which being so far away was anything but impressive, but it was something at least. It wasn't showing any signs of moving in a hurry, so we gave up and saw a **Holly Blue** Butterfly on the way back to the car.

It was 12pm by then and we were starving, so we ate our lunch and couldn't believe how lucky we had been so far. We had done 10,000 steps and walked 6.42km already and we still had the afternoon to go. There had been 4x Dotterel reported from a field at Choseley, which are always nice to see and it wasn't far away either so we decided to go for a look. I stopped to get petrol at Burnham Deepdale first and then when we approached Choseley we had to keep our eyes peeled for the sign for Chalkpit Lane as there's 2 nearly identical turn offs. Fortunately, I guessed right and I turned off the main road and drove up Chalkpit Lane, following the directions off Birdguides and flushing some **Red-legged Partridges** off the road.



Somewhere in this field!

The whereabouts of the birds was given away by the 3 cars that were parked up at the side of a ploughed field, so I pulled over and we had a quick scan of the ground. It took a couple of minutes, as they were very well camouflaged, but I found the 4 **Dotterel** running around and got Wendy onto them. They were miles off, so I drove down and parked up with other vehicles in the hope of being nearer, so I could get some video. Wendy picked up the call of a **Corn Bunting**, which had been reported as well but we haven't heard in the area for a while so that was great to hear. As I filmed the birds I found a single **Golden Plover** too but by then Wendy was getting bored and had wandered off down the road to see if she could see the Corn Bunting. She followed the call until she got to where she reckoned it was and then peered through the hedge into a bright yellow field of rape. She spotted the bird sitting out on top of the flowers calling non stop and then another flew up from the ground and went into the hedge, so there was 2 birds. By the time she got back the Dotterel were closer, so I had slightly bettered my distant footage and was happy enough to leave.



Video grab showing how camouflage they are!

As I drove up the road to turn around I spotted a **Stoat** running up ahead of the car, so I grabbed my camera. Unfortunately it wouldn't focus through the windscreen and then another car came round the corner and started driving towards us and flushed it into the hedge.....Booooooo :(.



Noooooo!

After I had turned round we drove back to the same spot so I got out to look at the field Wendy had seen the Corn Buntings in to try for some video but they had gone.....Doh! We also couldn't see the Dotterel anymore...Haha skills! I eventually re-found them, but they had gone even further away so we set off for our next location. By then it was raining and felt decidedly cold, so our enthusiasm for going for another walk was quickly reduced. All of a sudden I slammed on my brakes when a family of tiny baby Pheasants ran out from the hedge into the road.....Aarrghhh! I really thought I had driven over some of them, which would've been awful. I opened my door and held my breath as I bent down to check underneath the car, but luckily they had all gone under my car and out the other side unscathed.....Phew! Wendy wanted to go to Thornham Deli, so that was our next stop and as usual it was absolutely rammed with very posh people with more money than sense buying tat for 100s of pounds. There were loads of crazy people queueing up waiting for tables in the café and the usual hordes of slow moving browsers, so she grabbed some pressies and got out as quickly as possible.

The next plan I had was for a walk at Thornham Harbour which we had never done before, but when we arrived at 1.44pm the weather was looking pretty dodgy and it didn't look very inviting at all. I parked up and we headed off on a footpath through the reedbed, not the actual harbour because that would be rammed.



Thornham

We heard a **Cetti's Warbler**, which was the first of our trip but it was cold and grey and we didn't even hear a Bearded Tit let alone see one, so we didn't hang about and were back at the car by 2.18pm. By then it was raining, so we had timed it well but wondered what we were going to do for the rest of the day. I took a diversion to the WC's at Titchwell and Wendy came out with a photo on her phone of a **Muslin Moth** she had found on the wall, which was a lifer.



Bog mothing!

I was slightly envious but wasn't going to risk being arrested or banned from Titchwell for life by going into the ladies for a look :P. The men's were far too busy for my liking, so I decided to hang on until I got to Holkham, which was much quieter.....Phew! Wendy nipped into Adnam's to get some more pressies and instead of going home I wanted to go back to see if the Purple Heron was showing any better. We had done 13,900 steps so far, which considering we had done the whole Burnham Overy walk and we used to think it was a big

walk, didn't sound like much at all. Wendy wasn't keen on my idea, so I said I would go for a quick look on my own and she could wait in the car, as I really needed to get some better video of the bird. What I had already was so bad you could literally just about make it out, so I really hoped it would be more obliging second time round.

When we got back to Burnham Overy it was 3.08pm and still raining finely, so Wendy was happy enough to stay in the car with Lyca and I set off down the footpath. I semi ran down the track to try and decrease the time Wendy and Lyca would be sat around doing nothing, so got down to the same spot really quickly. There were more people looking this time round which was a good sign and even more optimistically, everyone had their bins up. I looked where they were looking and there was the Purple Heron, standing up, still at the back of the field but wayyy closer than earlier.



Purple Heron

I started getting video then there was a commotion from the twitch. I looked more closer at the Heron and could see it had caught a Mole! It quickly scarpered off to the ditch to devour the extremely unlucky creature. These views were so much better, so I messaged Wendy to tell her to come down. Knowing that she would probably struggle to get Lyca over the stile on her own I legged it back up the path and met her at the gate. Even though it was raining she was really pleased she'd gone back for a much better view of the bird. Back at the car it was 3.43pm and the rain started thrashing it down, so we had timed it well again. It had been a good day, but there was no point staying out any longer, so we headed for home.

It was 4.11pm when we got back to HQ and we sat down to chill out before tea. Wendy went off for a bath after that and I went out again at 6pm to see if I could get some more video at Cley.

This time I decided to go to the reserve proper and as I wandered over to the central hides a **Great White Egret** flew over. As usual the Norfolk birder Eddie Myers was sat in there. If I lived in North Norfolk I would go there every night after work as well! He was helping out 2 women who seemed like they didn't know much about birding. At one point they asked him about bird guide apps on mobile phones, which he said he knew very little about. I nearly got the balls to jump into their conversation to tell them about the Collin's Bird Guide app on

mobile phones and how great it is but thought better of it and kept quiet. Out on the scrapes were **Wigeon, Common Sandpiper, Whimbrel** and a nice **Little Ringed Plover**. I could also just make out a **Little Stint** at the back. A lovely Lapwing walked right in front of the hide, so I grabbed some video of that.



Lapwing video grab

I was just about to leave when 5 **Spoonbills** flew in. Even though they are breeding in Norfolk now it still feels special to see them.



Spoonbill video grab

With light fading I left those hides and walked round to the far hide. There was nothing viewable from there but there was a **Bittern** booming which was nice and I walked back to the car with my head down as I was getting tired. At one point I looked up and there was a Marsh harrier directly over me! I've never managed any decent footage of Marsh Harrier so

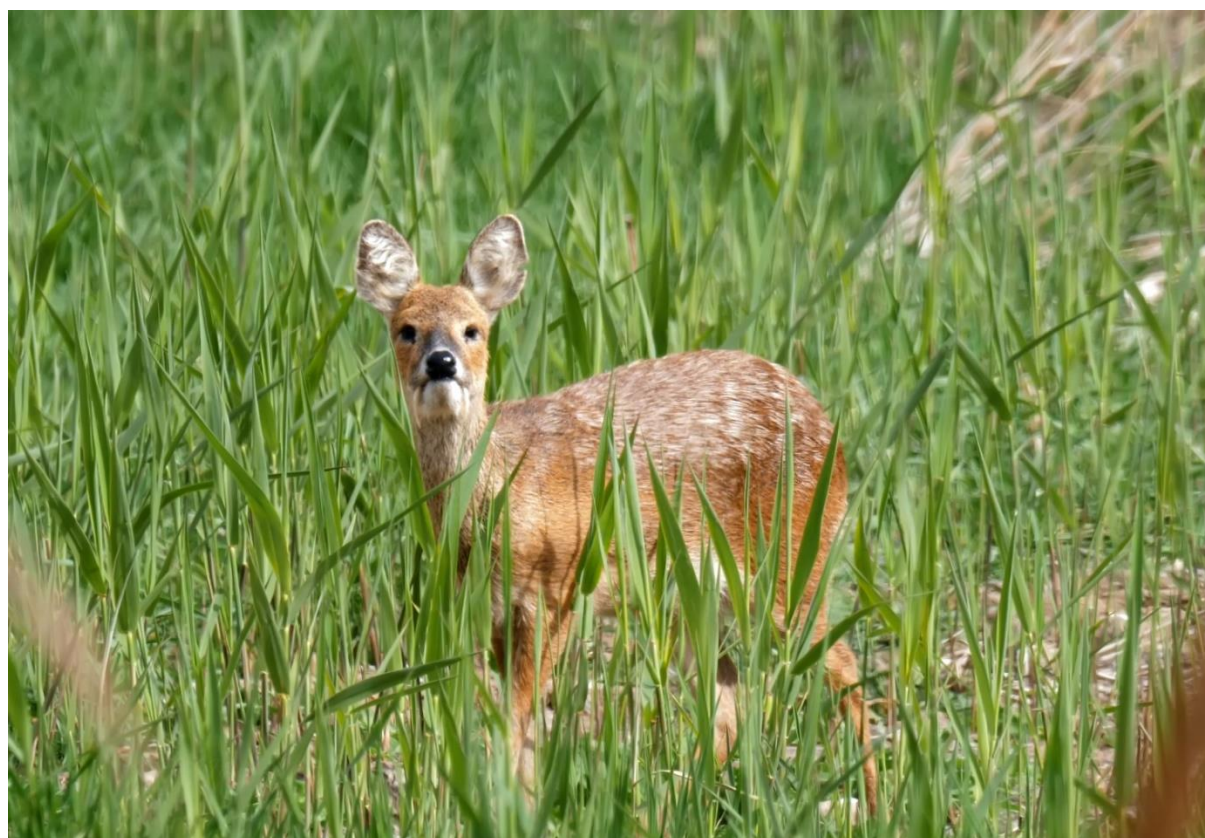
scrambled to get my camera on it and on the right settings. By the time I did it had gone.....
Noooooooo! :(

When I got back to HQ it was 7.30pm and I went through the days footage whilst watching TV. Lyca was curled up in the middle of the beanbag again and looked very comfy, so we reckoned we would have to buy her one for home. By 10pm we were knackered again and after I had taken Lyca out and we watched Ghosts we headed off to bed.

Tuesday 7th May

We were awake at 8am and the sun was shining, so it was a nicer day than it had been yesterday. By the time we had got ready to go out it was 10.10am and it felt pretty warm outside, so we didn't really know what to wear. We planned to do the Cley loop walk today seeing as we had hit both our target birds already, so we just hoped that something else would happen and that wasn't the excitement over for the week.

I parked up in the Visitor Centre car park at 10.10pm and as we were getting ready to go we could hear the sound of Swifts calling overhead. We scanned the sky above us but there was no sign of any but finally, when we spotted some new Swift boxes on the Cley Spy building, we realised that what we were hearing was a recording to entice them in to nest.....Doh! We crossed over the road and started walking along the footpath to East Bank where we spotted a **Chinese Water Deer** standing in a clearing staring at us.



Chinese Water Deer video grab

We had never seen one there before and didn't know whether it was such a good thing really seeing as they're not a native species. Although their numbers are on the rise in the UK since being introduced in the 19th century they're actually on the vulnerable to extinction list in east Asia where they originate from. Apparently, they're not reported to be doing any harm over here and are actually seen as an important species of Deer due to them being the only one

not to have antlers but tusks (or fangs) instead. It was quiet apart from that and we didn't even hear any Bearded Tits on East Bank either, which was very annoying as I thought this would be a great time of year to see them active.



No Beardies :(

There were the usual Sedge and Reed Warblers calling though and a bloke pulled us over as we approached him. He told us that he reckoned one of the Reed Warblers sounded very croaky and if he had been in Mallorca, he would have it down as a Great Reed Warbler. We hadn't heard anything that stood out as being different and it didn't call again, so he shrugged and said, "If there's a Great Reed Warbler reported here, remember you heard it here first." Ok mate, hahahaha (there wasn't). When we got to the end of East Bank Lyca started to pull me towards the sea, so I took her down for a paddle and she trotted along the tide line looking very pleased with herself.



Big waves!

We had a scan out to sea and found a **Common Seal** but out of the blue Lyca decided that she had diarrhoea, which was the last thing we needed.....Uh oh! As we walked across the shingle, she kept stopping every few feet to do more, so it was a good job we had a full roll of poo bags!!! We were a bit worried for a while but she was quickly back to her normal selfPhew! We turned down West Bank where there a flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese in the eye field, so I stopped to get some video.



Brents

The rest of the walk back was pleasant but noneventful and we got into the car at 11.45am. There were definitely less people out today after the bank holiday weekend, which was great and we decided to eat our lunch before going to our next place. There was a **Cetti's Warbler** giving it loads in the bushes nearby, which was the first we had heard on this trip. After we had had lunch it was 12.06pm so, I wasn't 100% sure where to go. The weather forecast was looking bad for the afternoon where we were but it looked nicer in South Norfolk so I took a risk and we headed off for a bit of a drive to the Brecks to go to a site I've known about since we first came to Norfolk 12 years ago, but we have never been to.

When we saw the sign for The Brecks it was 12.50pm and although it was 13.5c the sky was grey and the thick black clouds looked suspiciously like rain to us...oh flip :(This was bad news because the place we were going to was an NWT reserve claiming to be the best place in Norfolk for Butterflies, reportedly having 26 species in summer. We drove past a huge military airfield, which turned out to be RAF Marham and shortly after we arrived at Narborough Railway Line. I couldn't find anywhere to park, so ended up driving straight past it and having turn around. On my second attempt I found the entrance and pulled into a small and empty car park amongst the trees at 1.05pm.....Yes! It looked as though we were the only ones there, which was perfect, but it was anything but peaceful when we got out of the car due to an F15 jet flying over.



Difficult to find!

It was 14c when we set off and the first thing that caught our eye was a **Small White**, in the car park. We walked up a bank and through a gate spotting a couple of **Holly Blues** at the top of a bush and heard the call of **Yellowhammers** from the fields in the distance. There was a lot of trees either side of the path, but a bit further on it opened out and the south facing railway embankment certainly looked good for Butterflies.....weather permitting. Luckily there was blue bits of sky appearing and sun actually hitting the ground!



Narborough

Next, we spotted a nice **Brimstone**, which is always a treat for us Manxies but, as I reached to get my camera it flew off.....Typical! Two **Hornets** droned by (the big wasp, not the fighter jet) and then I caught a glimpse of a small brownish coloured Butterfly, which we subsequently lost very quickly. We had to refind it, as it could've been the lifer we were after and in doing so Wendy found another lifer. It wasn't what we had gone there for, but it was a lovely little **Pyrausta aurata** (or Mint Moth), which we had been wanting to see for years.



Mint moth

It was no wonder that they were about though as when we looked more closely at the ground it was covered in Mint, Thyme and Marjoram. Wendy joked that it was an edible bank, but I would like to see her munch her way through it! We found an **Orange Tip, Peacock** and looking ahead of us were more Brimstones than you could shake a stick at. One of the Yellowhammers was sitting out in the open on top of tree singing its heart out, so I couldn't let such an opportunity pass me by and stopped to get some video.



Yellowhammer

We were already impressed by the place and it obviously had the potential to come up with something a bit special. Wendy went down the bank to explore the bottom section while I stayed at the top with Lyca. This meant that we had all bases covered and were less likely to miss out on anything but, although we were optimistic, we had found nothing by the time Wendy had to come back up. Urrghhh! There were more Mint moths, so I took advantage of the opportunity to get some video and photos of them. They were a bit further down the bank so as I was moving down off the main track, all of a sudden I spotted a small dull looking Skipper type Butterfly and my heart started pounding. When I got a proper view of it I couldn't believe my luck and I was looking at a **Dingy Skipper**, which was our main reason for going there. Yes! This was another lifer and due to its tiny size and as its name suggests, dingy appearance, it was tricky to point out to Wendy. Luckily it flew, which made things much easier and when I knew she had seen it I handed Lyca over and made my way down the bank to get some video. Again it was hard to re-find and to make matters even worse it didn't settle for long enough to allow me to even focus on never mind get video of.....Grrrrr! After a frustrating few minutes I had managed to get some footage before it flew off and vanished....Phew!



Dingy Skipper

We weren't too concerned though, we had finally seen a Dingy Skipper. Like the Grizzled Skipper at the start of the holiday, I thought we would be a bit too early for either but now we had seen both.....well jammy. We carried on, flushing a **Common Lizard** from the path in front of us until we found a female Brimstone being chased by 3 males. We had never seen this behaviour before, so I stopped to get some video.

Wendy counted at least 7 males in the vicinity and the female was giving them all a good run for their money. By the time we got to the gate at the end we hadn't found any more Dingy Skippers, so that made seeing that one even more jammy. We then turned around and started to head back.



Old railway line

On the way Wendy saw a yellow coloured Longhorn Moth land on my arm, which flew off before she could get a photo of it to ID, but we worked out later that it was a **Meadow Longhorn**. We found our first **Blue Tit** of the trip too and before we knew it, we were back at the gate. There were loads of what looked like black flies, that hadn't been there when we had arrived, but on closer inspection we found them to be black coloured Longhorn Moths. Their antenna were ridiculously long, hence the name, but they were so high up in the trees that it was practically impossible to get even a record shot of one. When we looked into it we found that confusingly they were in fact **Green Longhorns** even though they looked black! We added **Large White** to our list on our way back down to the car park and couldn't believe that we had spent much longer there than expected and that it was 2.50pm. On the way home, as it was on the way, I wanted to go and have a look at the new scrape we had seen going past Wells. At 3.15pm it was saying that it was 15.5c, so thankfully it had been a warmer and much nicer afternoon than had been forecast.

It was 3.35pm when I parked up in the layby at the side of the road at the top of the track down to Wells floods. Walking down we could hear Yellowhammers singing, which we just can't get enough of when we're away. We got down to the bottom and Wendy spotted a **Great White Egret** strutting around on the scrape straight away, so we had a good scan to see if there was anything else of interest. The floods are two flooded fields either side of the path and it looked really good and considering only a few years ago used to be just flat and sterile farm fields it's a great addition to the area. Apparently, the farmer just decided to do it without any government grants or funding. If only we could have something like that in the Isle of Man.



Amazing!

The place was alive with bird life. There were loads of Little Egrets and Waders including 4 **Greenshank** and 2 **Common Snipe** and looking at the flooded field on the left we found another Greenshank and a **Spotted Redshank**. Nice. It was still lovely and sunny when we got to the car at 4.06pm and Wendy made me stop at Stiffkey Stores on our way home where she picked up a vegan steak thing for my tea.

By the time we got back to HQ it was 4.45pm and not long after getting in I saw a report of 11x Black Terns at Pentney Gravel Pits, which were only 5 minutes drive away from Narborough.....Grrrrr! If only I had seen the report earlier or had even mentioned that I thought there were some gravel pits nearby while we were there, but I hadn't looked into it.....Doh! I had planned to go out after tea but the weather started to close in, so I decided to stay in and chill out instead. Lyca curled up on the beanbag again and looked very comfortable while Wendy spoke to her Mum. There were **Bats** flying around the back garden and I started to think about putting the moth trap out for an hour before it rained. It felt a bit chilly when I went outside at 9pm, but I reckoned it was worth a shot anyway. We managed to find an extension cable, which Wendy plugged in behind the bed in the kid's room while I fed the trap cable through the window. After a bit of messing around we were up and running and hoped that we would find something good in it before we went to bed. A Hercules flew over and Wendy ended up going to bed early, leaving me to sort the moth trap out myself. Disappointingly, there wasn't a single moth, so although it was super quick to pack away, it had been a waste of time. After that I was knackered too and after letting Lyca out I went to bed at 10pm.

Wednesday 8th May

It was 8.15am when we woke up and even though there were 20 Wood Pigeons and 2 Red-legs in the garden the trap camera had failed to record anything! I had left the back lights on overnight to see if they would pull in any moths but apart from 1 nondescript Pug there was nothing. This bad start to the day continued, with it pouring it down with rain all morning, so we stayed in. After we had lunch, we went out to Cley Deli and Blakeney Spa for some bread and went back to HQ to wait for the rain to stop. Exciting or what? It was forecast to stop at around 2.15pm but it became very apparent that it wasn't going to, so when it started to ease

slightly I seized the moment and took Lyca out. Wendy had lost the will by then and decided to stay in to keep dry and warm and watch the 2 Squirrels in the garden. This proved to be a good move as just after I had left at 2.30pm it got really windy and the rain got heavier. Since things seem to have been happening in the Weybourne/Kelling area, I stupidly decided to have a walk around there and even more ridiculously I decided on a longish walk as well... :-\.

I parked up at Salthouse and headed east and amazingly it didn't rain on that section, but I didn't see anything decent either. When I got to Weybourne, the heavens opened and Lyca and I got soaked through. We unfortunately couldn't get a view of the Great spotted Cuckoo from this side, like I had hoped, so we turned round and headed back but taking a detour to check Kelling Water Meadows. Near the Weybourne Radar Station there was a very sad looking **Whinchat**. At the Water Meadows the rain stopped for a nano second and suddenly there were hundreds of hirundines over the water and a nice **Common Sandpiper** wandering around the edge. Carrying on I decided to take the slightly more inland path, which turned out to be a massive mistake. It was overgrown and with the rain (and now rain that had restarted) it was absolutely satched. I think I would have been drier going for a swim.



Very wet Lyca

Weirdly there was another birder out and about and it was the man who found the Red-flanked Bluetail at Warham years ago. The fact he was out looking meant it must have been good conditions for something! I had a chat to him and he said there were 2 Cuckoos at Gramborough doing the local Meadow pipits heads in. So, before I got back to the car, I had a look there to see if they were giving better views than the other day. I could see one Cuckoo sat looking dejected, deep in the bushes but couldn't find the other so the answer was no. Back at the car it said the walk was 6.1km, which was a bit daft in those conditions!

When I got back it was 4.45pm and Lyca was so wet that she needed to be blow dried and all my clothes and shoes had to be put on the radiators to dry.....Yuk! After tea Wendy went for a bath and having been house bound for most of the day, I decided to go out again at 6pm to give Titchwell a go.

It took 30 minutes to get to Titchwell. I don't know why but I always think it's closer than it actually is. The clouds were very threatening, so I ran around to the east trail which we aren't allowed on when Lyca is with us. Typically, the trail was closed 😞. Just before the closure point was a pond I had not seen before and there were **Red-crested Pochard** on it and a Muntjac deer walking through it.



Red-crested Pochard (video grab)

A big pile of Black-headed Gulls flew over making a racquet, so I scanned through them hoping for a Med Gull and sure enough 2 **Mediterranean Gulls** were in the flock.

I headed back to the main path where a young lad ran past me saying, "Cattle Egret!" That would be nice way to end the day, but where? Then he said, "Freshmarsh!" so I just headed that way. When I got there, he said that it had flown back to the cow field and then headed off in that direction. I thought it would be rude to just go, "Nahhh" and walk the other way, so I followed them back towards the cow field, where annoyingly the cows were miles away and there was no Egret. They just shrugged their shoulders and left! I then turned round and went back to the path to continue with my planned walk. Very little was about just a **Common Tern** and some **Turnstone**. In the fenced off nesting area was about 1000 Black-headed Gulls. I'm not sure if that's what the RSPB hoped would nest there or not. I then tried the Brackish marsh but that was even worse, so I gave up and headed back. On the path back were two frogs so I shifted them out of the way.

On the drive back I stopped off at the brilliant Wells flooded field. There was a Spoonbill feeding away dead close to the fence so got some nice video of that.



Spoonbill (video grab)

On the field behind a flock of 5 **Green Sandpiper** flew in then within about 20 seconds flew off again! I walked to the end of the path to see where it went but it just was a dead end. It was lucky I did though as a lovely Barn owl floated over the hedge and away.



Barn Owl (Video grab)

Happy with this I turned round and headed for the car. One last look at the flood and I found 1 of the **Wood Sandpipers** that had been being reported there recently.

It was 8.50pm when I got home, which was perfect timing for Taskmaster at 9pm.....Haha! After that we reckoned it was time for bed, as we had an early start planned for tomorrow to make up for today.

Thursday 9th May

We woke up at 6.20am, which was the earliest start we'd had since being away. It looked grey outside looking to the left but brighter to the right, so we hoped that it was going to improve. Sure enough, by 7.30am it was looking much better and we got ready to go out feeling optimistic that we would stay dry. We left at 8.51am and with it being our last day in Norfolk we felt quite lethargic. We hadn't tried for one of our favourites yet, which is Dartford Warbler, so with the weather being better this was our last chance. The horse that had been a permanent feature at the duckpond at Salhouse still wasn't there, so we can only presume that he's no longer with us ☹. Wendy nipped into Weybourne Deli for a look and came back with a pain au chocolat for me.....Om nom nom. Unbelievably I got lost again trying to get to Kelling Heath due to the diversion still being there from last year! We thought the IOM was slow with its roadworks...Hahaha! Eventually I had to pull over and put it in my sat nav just to speed things up a bit, seeing as we had to be there as early as possible if we stood any chance of seeing an elusive Dartford Warbler.

By the time I parked up in the car park it was 9.26am, the sky was grey and the wind had picked up too. This was either going to be a total waste of time or a great move with the potential of seeing Dartford Warbler, Woodlark and Turtle Dove. We could hear a Deer barking in the woods as we set off, but we had a funny feeling it was going to be a wasted effort. Kelling Heath is always a bit hit and miss and first off, we headed to the spot where 'Kelling' John had shown us for Adder. We weren't remotely optimistic with the sun being stuck behind a load of grey clouds, but we cautiously walked around the edge of the area with our eyes to the ground. We got back to the path having found nothing, so left empty handed again hoping that this hadn't set the trend for the rest of the walk! We headed towards the railway line and started walking towards the burnt area when suddenly some small birds dropped down.



Previously burnt area

Thinking that they were worth checking I started to look for them but they had obviously landed somewhere out of view because I couldn't see any of them. Eventually, I found some Meadow Pipits, perfectly camouflaged against the ground, but then 4 of the birds lifted and flew off. This revealed 2 **Woodlarks**. which was good news. I hoped they would land

somewhere in the clear, so I could get some video. Typically, they flew down the side of the railway embankment and vanished, so that idea went out of the window, harumpf. There was a pair of **Yellowhammers** nearer to the top, but the Woodlarks were nowhere to be seen, so we carried on. We crossed over the railway line and could see 3 birders, one of which had a big lens, standing looking into the gorse. They either had something or they were just standing waiting, in the hope that it would come to them. None of them looked remotely excited, so I chose to ignore them, much to Wendy's disgust. We found a pair of Stonechats, which were the first in a while at Kelling heath for us, so we kept an eye on them just in case they had any followers. We stopped to chat to one of the birders who was on his way home by then and he told us that the others had a Dartford Warbler.....Doh! Wendy was like, "I told you so!" which was annoying, so we went back for a look.



Dartfordy area

We stood around for ages without any sign of it but finally we heard one calling and then it flew behind us and landed on the gorse. I was pretty chuffed with that, as you can't sniff at a **Dartford Warbler**, but Wendy hadn't seen it because there was a tree blocking her view.....Uh oh! The other birders cleared off at that point, so we had the place to ourselves at last. Luckily Wendy saw the bird fly and it landed up on top of the gorse bush in full view, so she had finally seen it....Phew! I got some video of it before it flew off again. We tried to re-find but couldn't see it anywhere so headed back.



Dartford Warbler (video grab)

We retraced our steps hoping to catch up with the Woodlarks again, but we had no such luck and we got back to the car at 11.31am. We had also been hoping to bump into John at some point too but, again he was nowhere to be seen. We'd only done 7,200 steps so far and were running out of ideas for places to go.

I headed off to Cley Visitor Centre to look for some pressies and bought a Birding in Finland DVD too before we ate our lunch in the car. Lacking inspiration I reckoned we should go back to Kelling Water Meadows for a last look to see if anything interesting like a Black Tern or Red-rumped Swallow had dropped in.....Dream on! Driving past Cley Deli we had to laugh when we saw a Blackbird standing on the fruit for sale outside the shop, I'm assuming he was going to use 'cheep and pin' (.....grooannn :P). We stopped off at the HQ to dump off our rubbish and pressies and quickly made use of the loo before heading out again at 12.54pm. It suddenly occurred to me that nobody had reported any Yellow Wags yet, which just seemed a bit odd in May. I then got a report of a Stone Curlew SW of Kelling in a ploughed field, so it looked as though I might have made the right decision as to where to go next for a change.

It was 1.02pm when we arrived at Kelling and we headed across the busy main road and started walking down the footpath. There were nowhere near as many birds as we had seen and although it was 12c it felt colder (to be fair 12c in May is rubbish!) We heard it first and then saw a very nice **Lesser Whitethroat** out in the open, so I stopped to see if I could get some video. It even sang for us, but it cleverly kept well covered behind leaves at all times.....Grrrrr!



Lesser Whitethroat (video grab)

We then carried on and came to some fields. The directions had been to a ploughed field but this one was long grass. I scanned it anyway and found a handful of **Grey Partridge** which was nice. The next field along was a ploughed field and it was huge. Surely, we had no chance of finding a well camouflaged bird in amongst the hundreds of deep furrows we would have to trawl through?



Needle in a haystack!

The bird could've been anywhere amongst that lot, so after a short dejected scan I carried on with Lyca leaving Wendy behind me. Shortly after that I heard her saying, "Eee arr, what's that?" and my ears pricked up, so I wandered back. She directed me onto it and somehow, she had managed to find the **Stone Curlew** motionless and asleep in one of the furrows! It was a long way off, but I got some very distant video of it anyway, as it had been years since we had seen one. Impressive skills from Wendy.



Middle of the picture!

When we got down to the Water Meadows it looked pretty dead, so Wendy stopped to admire the tiny baby cows. Just then, from amongst the cows, I spotted 3 **Yellow Wagtails** fly up from the ground and one of them looked as though it had a light grey head.



Interesting Yellow Wagtail

Before I could give the bird a proper look a family with a very cute puppy (called Rosie) came round the corner, so we had to get Lyca out of the way. Instead of walking past us the family stopped to show Rosie the cows and unlike Lyca she was very good although she was making a lot of excited squealing noises. They were in no hurry, but I just wanted them to go, so that the Wagtails would come back and I could get a better look. When they had finally gone I went back over to the fence and Lyca started barking at the cows, so they all flew off again. There were 5 in total and it was hard to keep up with them running around the cows hooves but I changed my mind about there being any interesting race Yellow wag and just played it safe with the standard flava. They all flew around again and landed in a bush next to us before

quickly lifting up and flying off. A second later, there were Hirundines everywhere! They had obviously all just dropped in and were feeding over the pool, so we were seeing a bit of action for a change. We carried on and as we approached the shingle ridge I spotted a Whinchat in the field, assuming it was the same one as the other day. Wendy found some Dodder growing on the ground, so I had to get a photo.



Dodder

Whilst we had time, I checked the map on my phone and seen the path by the side of the airfield linked up with Muckleborough Hill so I persuaded Wendy that we should go have one last look for the Great spotted Cuckoo.

It was a nice walk and there were a few people looking but there hadn't been any sign that day.



Micro twitch

We didn't expect anything as it hadn't been reported for days so we quickly headed back towards the car. Back at the Water Meadow a Common Sandpiper was another new arrival on the pool, which just backs up our theory of having to sit there all day if you want to find something interesting.

By the time we got back to the car it was 3.28pm and we had managed to get 14,566 steps in after a slow start. I stopped at Blakeney Spa and we were home at 3.51pm to start packing up ready to leave in the morning. I discovered that I had somehow managed to lose my lens cap at Kelling, so wondered if I should go back after tea to find it. Wendy went for a bath, put the washing on, made the sarnies for tomorrow and after that we had our tea. I put the dishwasher on for the last time and headed out again at 5.30pm back to Kelling.

I got to Kelling heath at 5.40pm and set off to retrace my steps. A nice **Green Woodpecker** flew across my path, so I hoped that this was a good omen. I ran up the track we'd walked on earlier, but for some reason I stopped to check my phone. "Bluethroat at Cley 5.38pm!" Aarrghhhh! Bluethroat is probably my most wanted bird nowadays and they seem to be occurring less and less frequently in recent years. However, I made probably one of the worst decisions ever and decided to keep looking for my lens cap which, typically I didn't find. I then set off to Cley, getting there at 6.30pm, but if I had gone straight away I would have got there at 5.58pm. On the way I messaged Wendy (using Android auto!) to say that I would go look for it and if I was successful would come back and get her.

Halfway down East bank, I met the founder of the bird, who told me it had flown into the reeds after it had been feeding on the path. Dejected I walked up to the group of twitchers which included the notorious Norfolk photographer/flusher, so knew my chances were zero. One of the blokes told me he got a 1 second view of it just as it flew.....1 minute before I got there!!!! Noooooooooo. If I had gone straight away, like I should have, I would have easily seen it and best of all had excellent views. Still, not one to give up I thought I would be clever and try and outsmart the Bluethroat. I thought that if I was a Bluethroat I would head for Blakeney point, so I walked along the shingle ridge to the North hide to try and cut it off. Obviously, that didn't work so I gave up, feeling very depressed seeing as it was all my own fault. Also, as a double whammy I just knew it would get seen tomorrow when we would have left Norfolk... 😞

When I got back to HQ it was 7.15pm and Wendy was slightly confused as to why she had rushed to dry her hair and get ready to go out when I didn't come back for her. In her panic she had misread my message and hadn't realised that I was going to go for a look first and only come back for her if I saw anything....Doh! I got changed into my PJ's and finally sat down to watch the Finland DVD I'd bought from Cley to try and cheer myself up. I had no idea what we were going to do to fill the day tomorrow and apart from a Woodchat Shrike that had been reported over the past week in North Yorkshire, just above Scarborough, there was nothing to twitch. The question was, whether or not we both wanted to see it enough as it was a bit out of the way? Having always wanted to see Woodchat Shrike I reckoned it would be well worth it, while Wendy wasn't thrilled by the prospect of the extra miles in the car. I was tired, which wasn't surprising when I saw that I had crammed in 23,500 steps over the course of the day. While I was putting the trap camera out, we heard a Hercules going over and as we had a long day ahead of us we headed off to bed at 9.50pm to try and get a decent night's sleep.

Friday 10th May

We were up and about at 7.20am and it was a nice sunny day, so after I had taken Lyca out I thought I would try and get some drone footage at last.



Cley reserve

After that I checked the nights trap camera footage and had captured a Deer on the lawn. Wendy was busy scurrying around packing up and I got a report through of someone claiming the Bluethroat at 8pm last night even though I had seen everyone leaving at 7.30pm when I was sitting in North Hide.....Hmmmmmm? We weighed up the pros and cons of going up to Yorkshire and it was a unanimous decision that we should go. I knew it would be tight on time, but we should've been able to fit it in before going to Heysham. By the time we were ready to go it was 10.06am and our first job was to get rid of our glass at the recycling bins nearby. After that Wendy had a horrible thought and realised that she couldn't remember seeing Lyca's coat when she was packing up our stuff.....Uh oh! This made me really narky because I didn't know if we needed to go back to HQ or not, so I eventually had to pull over and got out for a look in the boot. Luckily, I found it stuffed in a bag with my waterproofs from yesterday, so we were able to carry on to Blakeney so that Wendy could drop the key back to the office. We got stuck behind a slowcoach after that, which was frustrating to say the least. I wanted to give Wells Scrape another look before we left and when we arrived at 10.30am we were shocked to see how many hirundines were feeding over the pools. There were swarms of them, as well as loads of midgies, and I couldn't help but think that there would be a Red-rumped Swallow reported very soon and it would just be our luck that everything would start happening after we had got home.....Grrrrrr!



What a great new addition to the area

Knowing better this time I drove down to save us some time and we got out of the car to have a proper look. There was no sign of the Great White Egret but there was still a Spotshank on the right and a **Green Sandpiper** on the left pool, which had dried up considerably since our last visit. There were too many hirundines to feasibly go through thoroughly enough and the midgies were becoming a nuisance, so we gave up and headed off at 10.45am. I needed petrol before we left but when we got to Burnham Deepdale, the petrol station was closed due to refuelling, so I had to drive straight past it.....Uh oh! We can't seem to have a holiday without some sort of fuel drama these days.

Our next plan was to chance our luck at NWT Holme Dunes in the hope of finding a last minute Ring Ouzel or something and I parked up at 11.26pm. Wendy nipped into the Visitor Centre to get our entry stickers and read the reports board before we set off.



Holme

We had only walked about 100yards when a Blackbird flew out of a bush and across the path in front of us. Unbelievably it was actually a **Ring Ouzel**, so it was a good decision going there. I spotted a Lesser Whitethroat in the bush, so I stopped to get some video but it didn't work out. While I was doing that Wendy found a **Common Redstart**, which along with the Ring Ouzel didn't hang about and we had been very lucky to see. We carried on up the path but after the initial flurry of excitement it all went very quiet and then started to rain, so we headed back. Obviously, things were on the move though, which is just our luck on the last day.

It was 11.57am when we left and as I drove down the reserve track, we opened the windows in the hope of hearing a bird we hadn't heard yet. Fortunately, Holme didn't fail us and Wendy was first to shout out, "**Grasshopper Warbler!**" which was a nice addition. There was a massive new house being built along the road and the derelict cottage that we had seen on previous visits was still untouched. There was however an Architects sign outside, so no doubt it'll soon be turned into something very flash, not to mention expensive! Before we drove off we both made use of the WC and it felt decidedly cold outside. I stopped at the petrol station in Hunstanton and this time was able to fill up, so that was one worry off my mind and I knew I wouldn't run out in the middle of nowhere. We got stuck in a huge traffic jam approaching Sutton Bridge and an Ambulance went whizzing past us all shortly followed by a recovery vehicle. There had been a crash just over 2miles ahead of us, so it was slow going as we entered Lincolnshire at 1.34pm. Not what we needed. The recovery vehicle came back with a car with a stuffed bonnet on the back, so the scene had obviously been cleared already. There was a dead Snake at the side of the road and finally at 1.41pm we passed the accident scene and having lost 44minutes were on our way again.

Apart from the Woodchat Shrike up in North Yorkshire there were literally no birds to twitch on our way up north, but I decided to give Frampton another visit. I parked up in the car park at 2.19pm and as usual the weather was awful, so we didn't plan on hanging around. We bailed out of the car and ran over to view the pool by the Visitor Centre and had a quick scan around. Having Lyca with us means that we are now not even allowed to walk on the fenced off path now either. There had been Black Terns reported there but nothing that day, so whilst Wendy went to the WC in the visitor centre and to check the report board, me and Lyca set about scanning. Within a nano second I had a "**Black Tern**" and a lovely Adult summer plumage one as well. Looking around there were actually 3 of them, so I started to get some video, while I had the chance.



Black Tern (video grab)

They were all hawking insects over the water and they were so quick, more like a martin or a swallow than a tern. Wendy came out and she spotted the Black terns straight away so all was good. These were our best views of Black terns ever so I was very pleased. They are great to watch. Whilst Wendy had been in the visitor centre the volunteer told her that the Tree Sparrows hadn't been seen there for ages and they seemed to have moved to the neighbouring village which wasn't good news for us. We didn't see any on the feeders so that was a shame. We didn't have time to go looking just to add one species to our list either! I drove down to the bottom pools and got out of the car for a look while Wendy stayed inside. There was literally nothing about and what was there was miles away, so I gave up and called it a day.



Nout

We left at 2.42pm and we had one more place left to try before our big drive up North to hopefully get us a lifer. It had been years since we had been to Whisby to try for Nightingale

and we were both really keen to give it a shot. Since we were there in May it seemed like the perfect time of year to try. We arrived at 3.45pm, which was already quite late and I paid my £2 for the car park before setting off. We headed straight to the hide at Thorpe Lake where Wendy commented that we hadn't seen a Great-crested Grebe yet, which was weird. (turns out we had seen one at Frampton, literally a few hours earlier.. dohh)



Whisby

I scanned the lake and instantly spotted a **Great-crested Grebe**, which was quite amusing. On the reports board we noticed that there was just one singing Nightingale back on the reserve, which didn't bode well for our visit. The chances of being there at the exact time when a single bird decided to sing were pretty slim! Maybe we were too early in the year? I hope so as there is usually a lot more at Whisby than that. There were loads of teneral Damselflies flying around and when we got to the gate where the Nightingales are we realised that we were going to have to do it individually because Lyca wasn't allowed in.



Fair enough

Wendy went first and slowly wandered down the path hoping to hear the amazing sound we had gone there for. Needless to say, she heard nothing of the sort and after hearing a **Cuckoo** in the distance she turned around and headed back. While she had been gone I had also heard the Cuckoo but had seen a **Garden Warbler**, **Bullfinch** and a **Hobby** was flying around hunting over the trees. Brilliantly I managed to goof up my video of the hobby. 😞 I got some of the Bullfinch though.



Bullfinch (video grab)

When Wendy got back she caught a fleeting glimpse of it just before it disappeared, never to be seen again. I decided not to bother going to listen for Nightingales, as it seemed like a waste of time, so we carried on to go and check Teal Lake for the Black Terns that had been reported yesterday. Wendy was a bit annoyed that it was much further away than I had expected, which was an inconvenience considering we still had to get up to North Yorkshire....whoops. When we got to the lake there was nothing on it, so it had been a waste of time after all, so she was far from pleased. Wendy made a point of taking a photo of the 'scenery' just to make a point about my chosen walk.



Bit grim

We had failed to hear any Nightingales and hadn't found the Black Terns so we wasted no time getting back to the car as quickly as possible. It was 4.49pm by then and after we had both used the WC's and Wendy had relocated the 2x tiny caterpillars she found on her leg to a bush next to the car we prepared to leave. My sat nav reckoned it would take 2hours 23minutes to get up to our Yorkshire spot and looking at the time Wendy reckoned Lyca needed her dinner before we left. We had ours while she had hers too and after she had devoured her dentastick we were free to leave, by which point it was 5pm.

When we got to the Humber Bridge it was really busy and we paid our £1.50 and went through the toll at 6.05pm.



Humber bridge

We saw the sign for North Yorkshire at 6.54pm, so it really hadn't taken us that long to get up there and hopefully it would all be worthwhile. I looked at my phone and saw that Penny

Clark had some good photos of the Bluethroat from last night, which puzzled me no end seeing as I had seen everyone leaving and hadn't noticed anyone taking photos anywhere. Weird. But it really was another kick in the nuts. 🤔 It was 7.12pm when we drove through Scarborough and I finally found the car park at Long Nab in Burniston at 7.23pm.....Yey!

It was still sunny, which was a good start but then I saw reports of Wryneck, Pied Flycatcher and (would you believe it) another Woodchat Shrike from Flamborough Head earlier, which had we known about would've been much easier and quicker to get to and had the potential of seeing 3 great birds.....flipping heck! I was fuming, but it was too late to get annoyed and we were there now, so all we could do was give it our best shot. We waited for a bloke with a dog off the lead to go past before I got Lyca out and Wendy collared him before he went past. She asked him if we were going in the right direction for the Woodchat Shrike and although he had bins round his neck he knew nothing about it, which was worrying. She asked him where the observatory was (which was in the details given on Birdguides) but he didn't know that either, even though he was a long-term local. All he could tell us was that there we would find a coastguard hut if we followed the footpath, so with that we decided to just wing it. We started to doubt that we were even in the right place but when we found an information board it confirmed that we were on the right track.....Phew!



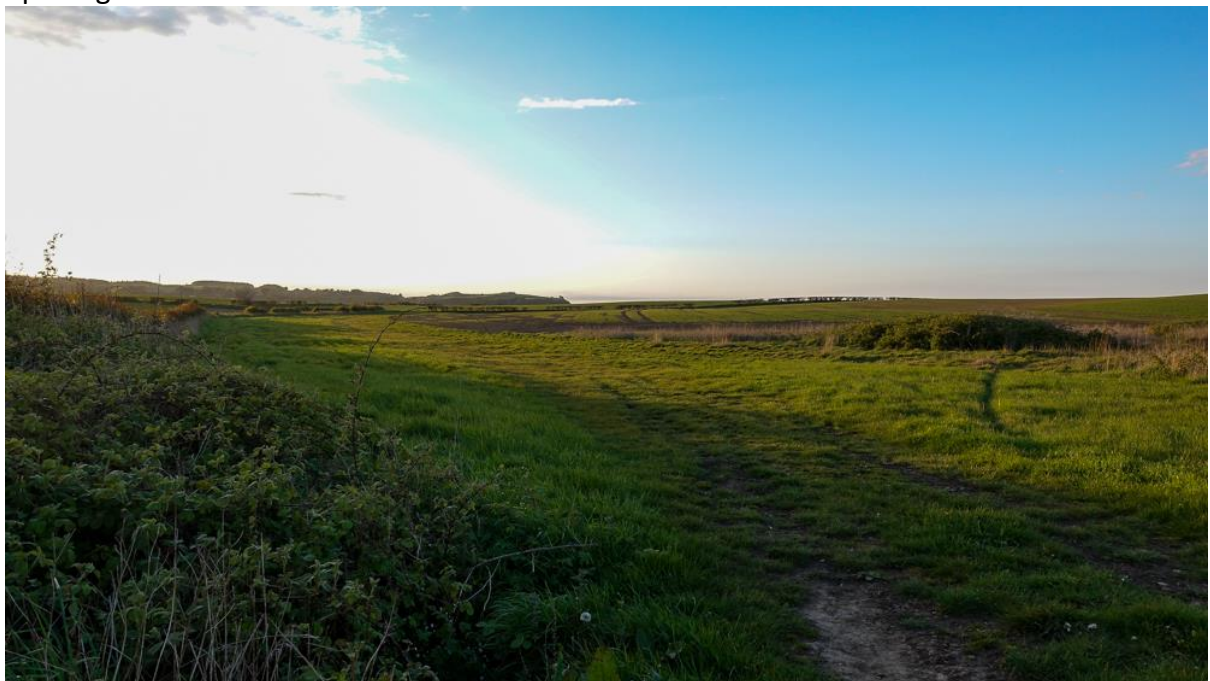
Crook ness board

After he had gone we set off on the coastal path, which we followed until it turned off to the left. Looking behind us we had great views of Scarborough and with the sun just beginning to set the lighting was very nice.



Scarborough

We were looking for a scrape and some gorse but as far as we could see there didn't seem to be either, so we were stumped. Wendy kept scouring the fields with her bins and suddenly spotted a small area of gorse in the field above, so we went to investigate. It was only a very small patch and surely not significant enough to use as a landmark for birders, so we started to worry that we had gone wrong somewhere again. I was also concerned that we might be off the footpath as I couldn't see any signs anywhere. So we made sure to stick to the hedgerow just in case. There was no sign of any Shrike, so we walked down the field to an opening into the next one for a look around.



Where's the path?

The setting sun was shining straight in our faces, so we couldn't see much at all and after wandering around for a while I suggested that I went back for a last look at the gorse bush field before we left. Wendy went back to the opening to the next field and suddenly caught a glimpse of a bird that flew out of the near hedge and was flying low over the field towards the other side. Because of the sun she couldn't make any details out but something about

the way it was behaving made her take notice. When it got halfway across, she could just about see black and white markings and when it finally landed in the hedge it revealed itself as the **Woodchat Shrike**! She couldn't believe her luck and excitedly shouted me over to hopefully see it before it disappeared again. I quickly raised my camera and got a nano second bit of video before it launched itself off the bush and flew miles away up to the top of the field. We went after it and when I cautiously poked my head over the hedge to see where it was my heart sank. It was still miles away, so we had to keep going without it seeing us. It had turned decidedly cold and we were starting to feel pretty tired by then, so traipsing across a field wasn't what either of us felt like doing. Lyca was struggling too with the prickly thistles under her feet and although Wendy tried to skirt around them as best as she could, there were so many it was impossible. I went up ahead with my camera poised and ready for action, which was very lucky when I found it ahead of me. I managed to get some video before it flew again and when it did, we called it a day.



Woodchat Shrike (video grab)

Our diversion had been well worth it and we were both happy to have finally seen a Woodchat Shrike (even though this was our first attempt at one) especially a lovely Adult male. Lyca was obviously feeling left out by all the attention we had been giving the bird and decided to make us pay for it, by casually eating some dog poo.....Bleurrghh! We would have to make sure she didn't lick either of us for the foreseeable future as well or anyone else for that matter! We saw a **Kittiwake** out at sea on our way back and Wendy stopped to take more photos of Scarborough with the sun setting.



Scarborough

We were relieved when we spotted the car ahead of us, the walk to the Shrike had been longer than we initially thought. It was 8.28pm when we got in and after I had reported the Shrike on birdguides, seeing as nobody else had bothered all day, we left at 8.37pm by which point it was getting quite dark. I was semi sure we would be ok time wise for the ferry, as long as we didn't get stuck in any traffic jams. The sat nav was saying 3hours 30 for the trip from east coast to west coast. Looking at the map of England it looks way shorter than that! Because we were in unfamiliar territory we had no idea where we were and hadn't even heard of any of the nice villages we were going through. There was a Gypsy caravan and 2x Horses at the side of the road just after Pickering and at 9.54pm we went through Thirsk, which is the home of James Herriott. By the time we were back to the main road and approaching Hellifield I had started to feel really tired. A **Tawny Owl** flew off a fence post and across the road, which was the first of our trip and a great last minute addition. My headlights caught some eyes at the side of the road and we wondered whether they belonged to a Fox or Badger, but it was probably just a Cat.....Hahahaha!

Saturday 11th May

We got to Asda at 12.09am and I filled my car up with petrol before completing my drive and parking up at Heysham at 12.22am. Great timing, nothing to worry about 😊 All we wanted to do was get into the cabin and go to bed while all Lyca wanted was to curl up on Wendy's knee and cut off the circulation to her legs. The loading of all the containers seemed to go on forever and we started to wonder if there would be any room left for the cars. The foot passengers were called at 1.10am, so we started to feel hopeful of getting our heads down soon. We were so wrong though and more and more containers were being loaded. We got on at 2.04am! 11 minutes before the supposed departure time!. Grrrrr. We were far too tired by then and as soon as we got into the cabin we fell asleep until we were woken up at 5.55am having arrived in Douglas.

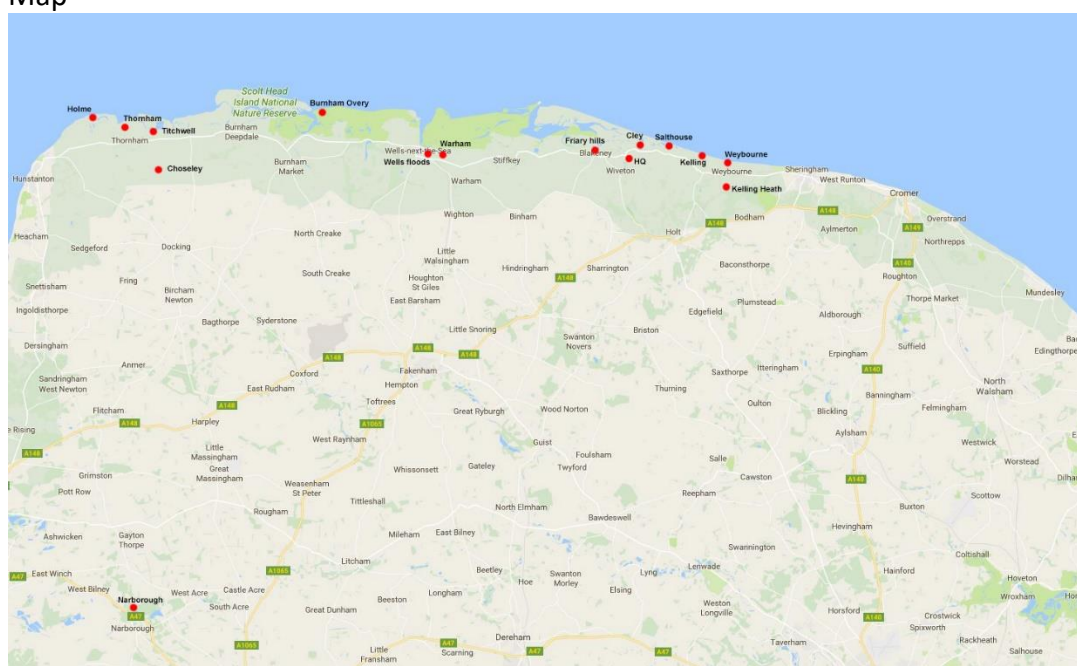


Not the best window view

It was a lovely sunny morning, but that didn't stop us from going straight to bed when we got home.....Zzzzzzzzzzz!

I had driven 895 miles over the course of the week and we had ended the holiday on a high with a lifer. Our prediction of things perking up after we had gone were correct and there was a Wryneck reported at Burnham Overy and another on the fence line at Weybourne below the radar station that day. We had been to both the right places but at the wrong time yet again! On the day we got home there was a Collared Flycatcher at Easington, which had we come home a day later we would have stood a good chance of seeing as it stayed put for a while. We couldn't complain though, as we had seen Great-spotted Cuckoo, Purple Heron and Woodchat Shrike which were all lifers. Not only that but we had finally seen Grizzled and Dingy Skipper too. We had seen 135 bird species in the week, with 3 lifers and 6 scarce sightings for us, so all in all it'd been a great holiday ☺.

Map



Bird List

| | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Mute Swan | Hobby | Common Tern | Reed Warbler |
| Greylag Goose | Moorhen | Feral Pigeon | Blackcap |
| Canada Goose | Coot | Stock Dove | Garden Warbler |
| Brent Goose | Oystercatcher | Woodpigeon | Lesser Whitethroat |
| Egyptian Goose | Avocet | Collared Dove | Whitethroat |
| Shelduck | Stone-curlew | Great Spotted Cuckoo | Dartford Warbler |
| Wigeon | Little Ringed Plover | Cuckoo | Chiffchaff |
| Gadwall | Ringed Plover | Barn Owl | Willow Warbler |
| Teal | Dotterel | Tawny Owl | Goldcrest |
| Mallard | Golden Plover | Swift | Bearded Tit |
| Shoveler | Lapwing | Green Woodpecker | Long-tailed Tit |
| Red-crested Pochard | Little Stint | Great Spotted Woodpecker | Blue Tit |
| Pochard | Dunlin | Woodlark | Great Tit |
| Tufted Duck | Snipe | Skylark | Marsh Tit |
| Red-legged Partridge | Black-tailed Godwit | Sand Martin | Nuthatch |
| Grey Partridge | Bar-tailed Godwit | Swallow | Woodchat Shrike |
| Pheasant | Whimbrel | House Martin | Jay |
| Little Grebe | Curlew | Meadow Pipit | Magpie |
| Great Crested Grebe | Common Sandpiper | Yellow Wagtail | Jackdaw |
| Fulmar | Green Sandpiper | Pied Wagtail | Rook |
| Gannet | Spotted Redshank | Wren | Carriion Crow |
| Cormorant | Greenshank | Dunnock | Starling |
| Shag | Wood Sandpiper | Robin | House Sparrow |
| Bittern | Redshank | Redstart | Chaffinch |
| Little Egret | Turnstone | Whinchat | Greenfinch |
| Great White Egret | Kittiwake | Stonechat | Goldfinch |
| Grey Heron | Black-headed Gull | Wheatear | Siskin |
| Purple Heron | Mediterranean Gull | Ring Ouzel | Linnet |
| Spoonbill | Common Gull | Blackbird | Bullfinch |
| Red Kite | Lesser Black-backed Gull | Song Thrush | Yellowhammer |
| Marsh Harrier | Herring Gull | Mistle Thrush | Reed Bunting |
| Sparrowhawk | Great Black-backed Gull | Cetti's Warbler | Corn Bunting |
| Buzzard | Black Tern | Grasshopper Warbler | |
| Kestrel | Sandwich Tern | Sedge Warbler | |