

Norfolk May 2012

Although we'd only been back from Scotland for a week we set about booking a return trip to Norfolk. This wouldn't give us (or our bank balances) much time to recover, but if we were to stand a chance of seeing the bird, which had so far evaded us, we'd have to go during spring migration again. By now we were no strangers to Norfolk but had lost count of how many times we'd successfully failed to pin even one of these birds down! All our previous attempts had resulted in reports flooding in the week before or after but none at all while we were there! Yet again the weather conditions were anything but ideal and as usual there was rain forecast for every day of our holiday. The wind must've heard we were going away too and was reaching gale force right up to the day we were booked on the boat. We had no choice but to go on the 8.45am Manannan sailing and it was looking as though it would either be a very unpleasant crossing or wouldn't sail at all.

Friday 4th May

Wendy was up at 5am and anxiously looked outside to check on the wind conditions. She was relieved to find that it had died right down and that there was just a hint of a breeze....sorted :). We left the house at 7.23am by which time the wind had picked up again and we were beginning to feel slightly worried.....Urrghhh! We parked up at the Sea Terminal at 7.32am and waited to board so, presuming we had bags of time Wendy jumped out of the car and headed straight for Costa! In that short space of time the cars started boarding so I panicked and went in to get her, as I didn't want to be the annoying car that blocks the queue! Fortunately she was already heading back towards the door (apparently there was a queue and only 2 members of staff) so we both legged it back to the car. We definitely hadn't expected to arrive at 7.23am and be boarding at 7.45am but I was quietly hopeful that we were heading for an early get away as we had a lot planned for our first day.

We found some empty seats up at the front or rather I pounced on them and stole them from under the noses of an old couple that were eying them up...Oops! From there we could see **Shags** on the Tower of Refuge, a couple of **Mallards** flew over and there were some **Great Black-backed Gulls** flying around but nothing could detract from the fact that the wind was now very strong and picking up by the minute. Wendy would be OK as she'd taken Stugeron beforehand but as I'm the driver I couldn't risk being drowsy so had to cross my fingers that I wouldn't need one of the 'sick bags' displayed on the window ledge in front of us. As we sat in the swell waiting to depart we realized it was now late leaving and at 8.50am came an announcement. There was a mechanical problem with the Linkspan and they were waiting for engineers to detach it from the vessel.....Noooooooo! Wendy already had ants in her pants after just over an hour sitting down and all I could envisage was disembarking 4hrs later and going home. At 9.05am came the news we'd been waiting for, the problem was fixed.....but we still had to wait for the luggage to be loaded....Grrrr! We watched 2 x **Swallow** coming in off the sea but by now Wendy was really feeling the effects of being stuck to a seat for too long. Finally at 9.15am we were ready to go BUT as the boat was packed to the hilt we would be travelling at a reduced speed and the estimated travel time was now 2hrs 50mins instead of the usual 2 hours.... Aarrghhhh! We eventually set off at 9.18am (35 minutes late) into very choppy waters and rocked and rolled our way out to sea.

We'd hoped to be able to do a bit of seawatching for once, as normally we'd be travelling at night, but we soon realized that it was totally out of the question. From our seats we watched the horizon disappear then appear again (bleurrghhh) and saw **Fulmar**, **Cormorant** and **Kittiwake**. Wendy had just started to freak out (she's not a good sailor) when a member of staff, who was collecting litter from passengers, very kindly nearly fell over. It was the fact that he turned his head round and gave the sea a filthy look that did it for her and she was off into hysterical giggling which had to be better than panic :/. Boredom soon set in again and we'd noticed that just behind us was an Irish bloke who did a good impression of a foghorn and bellowed out his entire life history to his seat neighbour for the entire journey.....yawn :/. Due to the bumpy ride we could hear tons of car alarms going off. Knowing how touchy my car alarm is I jokingly said,

"I bet that's mine, I wonder if you can see it from here?" I stood up to have a look and sure enough I could see my car and the alarm was going off.....flipping heck! I started to worry that the car battery would be dead by the time we got off the boat so in desperation pointed and clicked my key towards the direction of my car. Amazingly my alarm shut up.....Wahey :). This worked every time my alarm decided to go off throughout the journey. Skillz. After about 30mins or so the sea became a lot calmer and we breathed a sigh of relief that the worst was over. For the rest of the crossing we only saw **Gannet** and then something caught our eye, an **Arctic Tern** flying right past the boat....brilliant.

We eventually arrived at Heysham and there was another apologetic announcement by the Captain (who amusingly was called Captain O'Toole) of our arrival....Phew! At the Port there were loads of **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** nesting on the roof of the warehouse building and we disembarked at 12.05pm. I was hoping to be able to get back some lost time but we ended up getting stuck behind the foot passenger coach at the terminal. Grrrrr! After a painful 10mins waiting for that we headed straight for the W.C's and set off at 12.23pm for our first location of the day hoping that our luck would change. Strangely, Wendy emerged from the terminal totally coffeeless.....Uh Oh!

Heading out of Heysham and through Lancaster we picked up **Starling, Magpie, Woodpigeon, Blackbird, Rook, Mistle Thrush** and **Mute Swan** and we were finally making progress on the M6 by 12.53pm. Normally we do this journey in the dark so it was nice to see it in daylight for once. Passing the fields either side of the motorway we saw **Pheasant, Lapwing, Swift, Buzzard, Kestrel, Heron** and **Black-headed Gull**. Our holiday then almost came to an abrupt end when some idiot in a van suddenly hit his brakes and nearly caused a pile up.....Aarrghhhh! Luckily I was on the ball, kept my cool and handle the tank slapper one handed.....Phew! :D. Wendy was, by now, having caffeine withdrawal and after failing to find coffee at any of the 17 Services we'd pulled up at we needed to find one asap to top up her levels. With all the delays, traffic jams etc it was also looking as though we'd have to ditch off either Whisby or Frampton Marsh as we were aiming at doing our shopping in Fakenham before hopefully arriving at our cottage in Blakeney at around 9pm. It was going to be a very long day and by then we'd be knackered so we couldn't afford to arrive any later than that. We made the decision to visit Whisby on the way back instead and headed straight for Frampton. Wendy's eyes lit up when she saw the familiar sign for Blyth Services so I pulled up, she bailed out and made a run for Costa. She reappeared 10mins later with a massive coffee and some fries each.....om nom nom :). As we sat in the car park munching on our long overdue and very unhealthy lunch we saw **Goldfinch, Blue Tit** and **Collared Dove**. We didn't stick around for long and we were soon driving away feeling pretty worn out already.

At 4.58pm we'd reached Frampton Marsh RSPB where it was an absolutely freezing 8C and raining! There'd been a Black-winged Stilt reported there so we thought we'd try our luck and get there before it heard that we were coming and cleared off :P. As it was so late in the day the Visitor Centre was all locked up for the night and there was nobody else about. When we were getting our stuff together we heard **Yellowhammer, Skylark, Chiffchaff, Sedge Warbler** and there were **Greylag** and **Canada Geese** grazing in the field behind us. **House Martins** and **Sand Martins** zoomed over the pools by the Visitor Centre and on the water itself were **Black-tailed Godwit, Avocet, Gadwall, Shelduck, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Great-crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Coot** and **Moorhen**. On the edges were **Redshank** and **Little Egret** and a flock of **Linnets** and a **Reed Bunting** were flying around the hedgerows. We moved on to another pool at the 360 hide where we found some other birders and sat down to shelter from the horrible weather.....Brrrrrrrr!



View towards the 360 hide

From there we spotted **Brown Hare, Goldeneye, Common Tern, Meadow Pipit, Whimbrel, Ruff, Little-ringed Plover** and some **Brent Geese**. There was also **Pied Wagtail** and 3x very nice **Yellow Wagtails**, which, when one came pretty close, I got a photo of.



Yellow Wagtail

We scanned and scanned for the Stilt but couldn't find it anywhere so clutching at straws we moved to the last hide for a quick look. After all that effort in the teeth chattering cold there wasn't anything different from there, so we scuttled off back to the car to warm up and get going. This wasn't a good start to the first day of our holiday and we'd dipped on a bird we both would've loved to see. On the way back something caught my attention so I looked up to see a **Hobby** chasing after a Sand Martin.....Cool! We were worried we'd be too early for Hobby on this trip so it was a nice bonus to lift our dampened spirits. We watched the tiny Sand Martin putting up a brilliant fight until it looked like it was becoming too tired.....Uh Oh! Wendy looked away as she was sure it was dead meat..... but then the tables turned. The Hobby was now tired and just turned around and gave up! A narrow escape for the Sand Martin but the Hobby had just missed out on a vital meal. Excitement over we hurried to the car, put the heaters on and left at 6.07pm to head for the Supermarket. On the way we added **Oystercatcher, Red-legged Partridge** and **Chaffinch**.

We let out a cheer as we finally entered Norfolk at 6.46pm and after the final stretch of our journey we were at Morrison's in Fakenham at 7.20pm. We'd made the right decision to ditch Whisby and really wished that we could've skipped shopping too but we had no supplies at all and as there's no other Supermarket near Blakeney we had no choice. After wandering around in our usual bleary eyed daze we left an hour later with what we hoped would last us the week.

It felt like we would never get there but we pulled up outside our very familiar H.Q at 8.40pm and having stayed at Three Owls Cottages twice already we knew exactly what to expect. We were absolutely knackered but still had loads to do before we could sit down and relax. I relayed in and out with bags, rucksacks and cases while Wendy unpacked and tried to find a place for everything. We knew that tea was going to be a very late and rushed affair so we'd bought some instant noodles. I'd opted for the tried and tested version laden with additives and E numbers while Wendy had gone for some poncey 'no added anything au natural' ones. After boiling the kettle and waiting for a few minutes dinner was served.....yum yum (not) :(Three Owls is exactly what it's name suggests, 3 cottages linked together and we were very happy to see that we had no neighbours :). After settling in and having well earned baths we slumped into the chairs and found ourselves with that 'still moving' feeling after the rough boat crossing. It was cold in the cottage and the under floor heating and electric radiator didn't seem to be doing the job so we gave up and crashed out in a very chilly but comfy bed at 11.30pm.

Saturday 5th May

We woke up at 6am and the place was still freezing despite leaving the heating on overnight but then it was unusually cold for the time of year. Looking outside it was sunny but very windy and in the garden we saw a **Robin** and **Greenfinch**. We'd seen Barn Owls in the fields overlooked by the kitchen window on our previous trips so we were keeping our eyes peeled for them. There were about 10 x Brown Hares and the sky was filled with the sound of Skylarks but disappointingly no Owls. It was freezing outside so after debating about what to wear we opted for our warmest gear, which is designed for skiing hahaha. We hadn't set any plans for this holiday and didn't plan anything for our first day in Norfolk apart from to take it easy to recover from the journey down. Only problem was that there was a Wryneck at Minsmere, which had been reported for a week already. This was our most wanted bird and the reason why we'd gone so early in May but Minsmere was a 2hour drive away and in another County! We decided we couldn't chance putting it off, as there were no other reports of Wryneck at all, so we bit the bullet and decided to go for it regardless of how tired we were.

We set off at 8.03am and added **Long-tailed Tit, House Sparrow, Song Thrush, Sparrowhawk** and **Grey Squirrel** to our list and found it strangely nice to see healthy **Rabbits** again. The I.O.M seems to have re-introduced Mixi back into the (out of hand) population and every Rabbit we'd seen for the past few weeks had either been very ill or very dead. By 9.20am we'd hit The Broads with its Windmills and Waterways but were soon stopped in our tracks. As we rounded the corner we were faced with a stretch of water and what looked like the end of the line. After

stopping the car and reading the signs it turned out that we could get across on a weird car ferry which was manned by a young lad and would cost us £4 to get across...Cool!



Ferry thingy

We drove onto the platform and listened to the heavy, rusty chains groaning as he cranked it up and we slowly started to cross. In no time at all we were driving off on the other side and on our way again.

We pulled up at Minsmere at 10.05am and Wendy went straight to the Visitor Centre to sort our admission and more importantly to get some info. With a stroke of luck our bird was still showing and not far away so we took the short walk to the North Bushes, where a crowd of Birders had gathered, hearing **Greenshank** on the way.



Wryneck Twitch

At 10.15am we started looking into the bushes with baited breath, it would be like finding a needle in a haystack :(. We started thinking the worst but then somebody said, "There it is!" OMG we had to find it but it wasn't going to be easy being such a small and well camouflaged bird. Wendy finally pinned it down preening in a gorse bush and got me onto it. We couldn't believe that we'd finally seen the bird we'd almost given up on....a **Wryneck** :). This was a lifer for us both and on our first proper day too. The view wasn't great but after a while it eventually moved onto the ground and started feeding.....Brilliant! We tried to get some pics but it was just too far away for anything decent so we settled on some record shots.



Wryneck

While all this was going on we heard the loud blast of a **Cetti's Warbler, Green Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Lesser Whitethroat** and saw a nice male **Blackcap**. We started to get annoyed by the actions of some of the other Photographers as a couple of them were getting too close to the bird. We weren't the only ones there enjoying our first ever views of a Wryneck and we wouldn't be last but these guys didn't care. They were too set on getting a great shot for themselves to care if they flushed the bird so no one else could see it. Some were just plain rude and repositioned themselves right in front of us. At one point a massive fat woman completely blocked my view so I shouted, "EXCUSE ME!!!" The woman then turned round and glared at me. A bloke near me commented, "I wouldn't bother she won't hear." Obviously she's a well-known serial flusher/view blocker. Wendy was attacked by a bloke's tripod leg as he charged like a bull in a china shop past her....Grrrrrrr! Funnily enough though there was one thing they all had in common.....Nikon cameras :). No offence Bill :P

Totally sick of the agro we took a break and wandered over to the Visitor Centre to make use of the W.C. Wendy was dying for a coffee after all the excitement so we hit the Café. I spied a really nice looking pile of sausage rolls so Wendy grabbed one for me and asked for it to be heated up and got herself a cheese scone. I'd also seen some gorgeous looking millionaires shortbread but wasn't allowed any...sniff :(. We sat down and waited for mine but there was no sign of it by the time Wendy had nearly finished hers. They'd forgotten about the sausage roll, but were very apologetic, and they were rushed off their feet so I didn't mind too much when it eventually turned up. A couple sat down next to us and I noticed that he was looking at a decent shot of the

Wryneck in a tree on the back of his camera. I plucked up the courage to ask him when he'd got the shot to which he replied, "Oh about 5 minutes ago, it was performing really well." AARGHHHHH just our luck :(. After that we went straight back to the Wryneck just in case but yet again it wasn't performing so we carried on to the North Hide. There were a good few others there when we arrived at 11.53am and we added **Common Sandpiper**, **Barnacle Goose**, **Turnstone** **Marsh Harrier** and a lovely summer plumage **Knot**. There was also an escaped or maybe feral **Bar-headed Goose** which excited some square know it all upstairs who loudly proclaimed, "OOO what do we have here, a Bar-headed Goose all the way from the Himalayas?" We could hear the sighs and groans from the others but this didn't put off the square and he continued for about 10 minutes with his boring anecdote. Hahah. With nothing much out there we had a quick look in the woods on the way to the Bittern Hide picking up **Treecreeper** but failing to get a shot of it while it was right next to us :P. Down a flooded track we saw two **Roe Deer**, which were pretty close and they didn't seem the least bit bothered by us either....Nice! Wendy got the best photo of one of them too.



Red Deer

From the Bittern Hide at 1.15pm we heard **Water Rail**, **Bearded Tit** and **Reed Warbler** but not one booming Bittern. On the way to Island Mere we heard plenty of **Whitethroats** and Lesser Whitethroats and we sat down in the hide at 2pm.



View from Island Mere hide

On all our other trips away we've always played the unbelievably difficult game 'Spot the fit Birder' and so far Wendy was the only one with any points having clocked up a hefty 2 :O. On this occasion though I glanced over to a couple sitting down looking back through their pics and I finally got a point from the female portion! Apparently and typical of our luck a Bittern had walked through a gap in the reeds about 10mins before we'd arrived....Urrghhhh! There seemed little point sticking around so we gave up and as we walked back down the path we finally heard a **Bittern** booming and saw a **Marsh Tit**. We had one last look at the Wryneck who was still not posing for pics so decided to call it a day. Back at the Visitor Centre Wendy thought we should celebrate our first lifer of the trip with some of that millionaires shortbread but when she got to the counter there was none left....Nooooooooo! Back at the car at 3.30pm we had to make do with some crisps, which were no substitute, and we saw a **Coal Tit** in the bushes in front of us. Somebody had also forgotten to lock the car up after going back to get something earlier on but luckily everything was still there.....Phew. As we drove away at 3.44pm I noticed that my petrol gauge was saying I had 65 miles left in the tank and it was 64 miles back to H.Q so I'd have to find a garage to refuel soon.....Oooops!

Heading away from Minsmere we noticed a load of cars parked up at the side of the road and a group of Birders looking out over a field. We were puzzled so Wendy hopped out of the car and asked a guy what was going on. He told her that there was Whinchat, Stone Curlew and Ring Ouzel all in that one field.....Oooooo :). I parked up and we wandered down to where everyone had congregated. The first thing we noticed was the large number of **Wheatears** (suggesting definite movement) and the drumming of a **Great-spotted Woodpecker**. It wasn't long before I spotted the **Whinchat** sitting on the fence to our left and the **Ring Ouzel** (our first ever male) sticking close to the hedge, on the right, further up the field. Very nice :). Next on the menu was the Stone Curlew which was apparently way up at the top but we just couldn't find it...Grrrrrrr! We thought that if we walked up the road and into a gap in the hedge we'd stand a better chance and also get closer to the Ring Ouzel. Unfortunately the plan didn't work and we couldn't even see the Ring Ouzel from there either, until it flew straight past us and down towards the other Birders. Nice views for them I'm sure :(We gave up in the end and considered 2 out of 3 to be not bad at all and picked up a single **Fieldfare**, which we hadn't expected to see in May. We were back at the car by 4.23pm and heading for the first Petrol Station and worryingly for me Norwich (dual carriageway city roads) in rush hour! 15mins into the journey Wendy shrieked, "Barn Owl!" which was nice to see. I managed to fill the car up and Norwich wasn't the complete

nightmare I'd been anticipating so we arrived back at H.Q 6.10pm happy. Our faces soon dropped when we noticed a car parked outside the Cottage next door to us.....neighbours! Nooooooooooooo!

After tea while Wendy was enjoying her relaxing bath I decided I still had enough energy to go out to Cley. There'd been Temmincks Stint reported the day before so I went to Bishop's Hide, which overlooks Pat's Pool, to see if I could find them. It was nice to see that even with all the recent flooding that the water levels at Cley were nicely managed and although most of the mud from last time was covered there was still enough left exposed to attract the waders in. As I approached the hide I saw two Avocets swimming and 'up ending' like ducks in the pool on the right. I had a go at getting a photo but couldn't get anything decent so I moved into the hide. There was no one else there so it was all down to me to find the miniscule wader. As I scanned I spotted a lovely **Little Gull** quartering the pool, I tried to get photos of this too but I was on a roll with my poor skills and I ended up with nothing. There was also **Sandwich Tern, Wigeon, Common Gull** and **Pintail** elsewhere in the pool and I did spot a small wader but it was a Little Ringed Plover. I got a shot in the poor light and even though its rubbish it's still my best LRP shot to date! :)



Little Ringed Plover

Try as I might I couldn't find the Stint though and just was thinking of leaving when I spotted a Marsh Harrier lift up at the back with a Coot in its Talons! It was such a shame it was so far away but what happened next couldn't have been any closer! Out of the corner of my eye I saw a big white blob flying my way, which I assumed was a Mute Swan. When I actually looked at it I was very pleased to see a **Spoonbill** flying over. I started taking photos and the bird flew so close to the hide that it was too big in the frame! Very nice :).



Spoonbill

After a fairly productive couple of hours I finally left and went back to the cottage where Wendy had been chilling out and trying to ignore the conversations coming from next door. She told me that when she was watching the Hares from the window she'd spotted a **Muntjac Deer** munching its way down the field. I told her about my time at Cley but by then we were pretty much done for so it wasn't long before we slumped into bed.

Sunday 6th May

We didn't wake up until 7.15am feeling lethargic and looking outside it was overcast and grey which wasn't what we'd hoped for. With the amount of Wheatears we'd seen yesterday near Minsmere there must've been some kind of migrant activity happening closer to home so we thought we'd head straight to Friary Hills just down the road. After getting ourselves together we set off at 8.22am in our Skiwear as it was yet again freezing cold.

5 minutes later I parked up at Friary Hills and we walked off down the footpath with a slightly optimistic outlook.



Friary Hills

There were all the usual suspects in the bushes like loads of Lesser Whitethroats, Cetti's Warblers and Blackcaps as well as Long-tailed Tits and a **Jay** but nothing else. Disappointed we were back at the car by 9am having found nothing different at all and were collared by a very unusual and eccentric bloke. He talked for ages to us about birds and places he'd been and then he ushered us round to the side of his van. He then proceeded to bring out his travelling Parrot, who goes everywhere with him, and perched him on the fence. Not being a fan of Parrots I retreated away while Wendy chatted about stuff like where the furthest flung place the bird had been to etc. Another Birder was returning from where we'd just been, stopped for a chat too and mentioned 2 possibly 3 x Ring Ouzels. They turned out to be in a field just 100 yards further down the track than we'd walked 10mins ago! Dohhhhhh. We politely made our excuses and left the Parrot man to talk to the others and headed back down to the gate. We had a scan over the field checking out every Blackbird in sight until a male Ring Ouzel hopped out from behind a tuft of grass.....Cool :). We managed to get some very distant record shots and skipped back to the car for 9.29am.



Ring Ouzel

It was coffee o'clock again for Wendy so off she went to Blakeney Deli and returned with a cappuccino and some millionaires shortbread to make up for yesterdays deprivation incident. Instead of sitting around we decided to move straight off and go to our next stop before enjoying our treats.

We arrived at Warham Greens at 9.51am where Wendy finally had her fix and we shared the shortbread.....om nom nom :). The campsite was surprisingly busy despite the rain, probably as it was a Bank Holiday weekend, and there were muddy looking campers everywhere. Looking out over the saltmarsh we could see hundreds of Brent Geese (shouldn't they have gone already?) and we set off on our walk at 10am into the dubious looking weather and dressed for the arctic.



We've always had high hopes for this place and it's where we saw the Barred Warbler a couple of years ago but apart from a dead mole, more Lesser Whitethroats and some **Grey Partridge** there was nothing....Urrghhhh. Even the very light drizzle didn't bring anything in and at the whirligig we scoured everywhere (now knowing where to look for Wrynecks) but the only thing we found was this....



A wheelchair?

We were back at the car at 11.34am and our next plan was to try for a Purple Heron, which had been reported at the Joe Jordan Hide at Holkham the day before.

I couldn't work out which would be the quicker way to view Holkham Freshmarsh, either park at Lady Anne's drive and walk through Holkham pines or park at Burnham Overy and walk along the path, seawall and dunes. A quick look at the OS map and it looked like the Burnham way was shorter which also meant we could have a gander in the Burnham Overy Dunes which always seem to be mentioned when there's migrants about. We parked up in the layby at 12pm and looked down towards the walk ahead of us. There was no easy way of accessing the hide and it was still quite a way so we decided to have our lunch before setting off. 15mins later we were traipsing back down the track we'd seen the Black Brant from last November and it felt like only yesterday. The worrying thing was that there'd been no reports of the Heron all day so we weren't optimistic but felt that it would be worth it, if it was still there. At the bottom of the track is Burnham Overy Marsh where we saw a nice looking summer plumage **Grey Plover**, **Pochard**, **Dunlin**, **Egyptian Goose** and a distant but very pale **Marsh Harrier** which got me slightly interested as there had been a Rough-legged Buzzard reported recently. A slight bit of excitement did come in the form of a Lancaster Bomber flying over....always nice to see.



Lancaster

We continued on the path, which turned right, through the Dunes and towards the trees, which definitely looked like a brilliant area for migrants.



Burnham Overy Dunes

There were certainly loads of Willow Warblers around in the bushes and I got really close to a Green Woodpecker, which landed in a small tree just 40meters away. I quickly planned out a possible approach that would keep me hidden but after about 5meters the cover stopped and I was stuck. I then noticed Wendy appearing after her call of nature and she was walking straight towards the Woodpecker totally oblivious to its presence! I had to break cover to alert her but unfortunately the Woodpecker also spotted me and flew off into the trees. When I went down to

tell Wendy what had happened I could've kicked myself. Wendy was oblivious to the woodpecker because there was a massive bush blocking her view of it so if I'd used that as the cover to approach I could have got down to about 10meters! Aarrghhhh.... that should've been my best ever Green Woodpecker shot but instead I just managed a record shot.....Dohhh :(.



Green Woodpecker

After that little segway we walked on and on and on until Wendy threw a massive Karl Pilkington strop. She chucked herself on the floor kicking and screaming at the fact there was no decent birds and we'd walked about 20miles (more like 3). After we'd both stopped laughing Wendy finally composed herself and we carried on. I'd realized by then though that taking that route to the freshmarsh was definitely the wrong option...whoops a daisy!



Stroppy!

Eventually we reached the Joe Jordan Hide at 2pm, sat down next to a bloke and asked him about the Purple Heron. He hadn't received any news of it all day either so we accepted the fact that it had gone. If only we'd changed our plans the day before....Urrghhhhh! Apparently the Spoonbills had been showing well though.....until about 10mins before we'd arrived when they'd flown off! The pools were quite far away and there didn't seem to be much going on except for keeping our eye on another very pale looking Buzzard that I tried again to convert into a Rough leg. All of a sudden Wendy shrieked, "Stooooooooooooat!" Sure enough there was a **Stoat** legging it across the field. It then jumped into the stream, swam across and made a beeline for the rabbit burrows in the bank in front of us. It popped out of one empty handed and straight down another where it was gone for some time. It finally emerged with what looked like a Vole and ran off back the way it came, tripping over it's prey and stumbling in the boggy ground as it went. It swam back across the stream and we all followed it until it vanished into the distance obviously on it's way to feed it's young at the nest.....Brilliant! After that bit of action Wendy noticed a **Spoonbill** flying in which landed in the pool to feed. The pale Marsh Harrier from earlier reappeared and we heard one bloke say in a creepy muffled voice, "Oooooo pretty boy", which he repeated over and over again. His friend then joined in and we couldn't help but feel slightly creeped out by their dubious comments but didn't fancy thinking about it too much. We left the Hide at 2.40pm and made our way back to the car and in one of the fields we spotted some very nice summer plumage **Bar-tailed Godwits** which we'd never see back in the I.O.M.



Holkham Freshmarsh

Back at the Burnham sea wall it was obvious it was a bank holiday as everybody seemed to have decided to have a walk there and the footpath was the busiest we've seen it before. We had a giggle when a very posh sounding mother said to her overactive child, "No darling I really don't want anything up my bum!" We had to wonder how that conversation started :P.

We were back at the car by 3.55pm and I received a notification about a Bluethroat at Blakeney Point.....Aarrghhg! If this had come in sooner we'd definitely have ditched our plans and gone straight there instead but by now, after an 8 mile walk, we were pooped. We'd tried for the Bluethroat, which was a long stayer, at Welney on several occasions but failed every time so this was definitely one to try for tomorrow. After a big sigh and an eye roll Wendy managed to get her head round the harsh reality that we'd have to tackle Blakeney Point again. We passed Barn Owl corner on the way home and I pulled up at the side of the road. Wendy spotted a Reed Warbler in the ditch next to the car, we heard our first **Cuckoo** of the trip and watched 2x pairs of Marsh Harriers over the field but unfortunately there were still no Barn Owls. It was a long shot but as we were in the vicinity we thought we'd take a small detour to the Montague's Harrier watchpoint where we found another birder with the same idea. I parked up and we had a scan but noticed a couple walking a dog right up at the top of the field, which nobody is supposed to do! There was nothing about, which we already suspected would be the case, so as it'd started to rain again we weren't prepared to hang around.

We were back at H.Q by 5.10pm and unfortunately next door was still occupied. While Wendy went for a bath I decided to go out again but to Friary Hills this time.

My first thoughts were to check the fields near the end of the track to see if the Ring Ouzels were any closer. They not only were they not close but they weren't even there but as I scanned around for them I was really chuffed to find two **Common Crane** feeding at the back of the field!



Common Crane

Even though Norfolk is the county to see Cranes, they are all down in the Broads and it's rare for them to venture away from these areas so I knew it was a good find for Blakeney so I put the news out. Within 10 minutes 3 birders appeared to twitch my find! :). I found out later in the holiday that a local had spotted them 5 minutes before me, although I was first to get the news out so I'll take half a point there. I then moved round to Salhouse Marsh where there'd been reports of a Male Garganey but as this Marsh is a massive area to check I never managed to dig it out. After that I returned to Cley to have another look there. On the marsh there were 3x Spoonbills and the Little Gull was still floating around. Yet again I couldn't get a photo to save my life but I'm blaming the poor light for that :P. With the lack of excitement I suddenly realized there was an urgent need for a call of nature so I quickly went outside. Hearing that there was no one about I dealt with the issue but just as I finished I heard a mother and 3 kids come round the corner! That was too close for comfort! I could have been heading to the local Police Station for indecent exposure or something. While I was outside recovering from the shock I heard a Cetti's Warbler singing again, this time though I could see it with my naked eye crawling around the reeds.....Excellent! Until this holiday I'd only ever heard Cetti's and seen one fly on a single occasion. By now it was getting dark so I headed home but just outside Cley I came across a lovely Barn Owl hunting over a roadside field. I stopped to try and get pics but when my shutter speed said 1/60th at iso3200 I didn't bother and just watched it instead. Shame it wasn't lighter as it caught a Vole or Mouse and carried it off right in front of me!

Later on Wendy went outside for a listen and heard a Tawny Owl, which was very strangely the only one we heard during the whole week. It didn't make up for the fact that she'd missed out on the Cranes earlier though. As we were going to be tackling Blakeney Point in the morning an early night was our only option.

Monday 7th May

Wendy was up at 6.20am to prepare for the day ahead and although I'd woken up shortly after I decided to have a lie in and stayed in bed until 7am. It was a nice sunny start to the day with

blue skies but that wasn't what the forecast was saying. As we'd be doing a lot of walking we had to ditch the Arctic gear and go with more light weight stuff just to make it a bit easier. By the time we were leaving at 8.05am the clouds were rolling in again.

Our first stop was Friary Hills to try see if the Cranes were still there and we were there nice and early at 8.13am. We took a wander past the bushes, which appeared to be very quiet until Wendy spotted a bird hop onto the path. We got it in our bins and were very pleased to see our first **Redstart** of the trip and it was nice to have finally found a proper migrant. Further on in the fields we found a male and female Ring Ouzel, which were still distant but we stopped to get some record shots only managing to match the shots from yesterday.



Ring Ouzels

Up until a couple of years ago we both thought we'd never see one of these birds but on this trip we'd struck lucky and were definitely in the right place at the right time :). I then spotted a few **Mediterranean Gulls** further back in the field where the Cranes had been the night before. There was no sign of them today though so we decided to get going and Wendy's coffee fix was overdue. Luckily there's a nice Deli in Blakeney, which was our next port of call before doing anything else. I couldn't complain though as she returned with a pan au chocolat which she couldn't resist the freshly baked smell of as it sat in a basket on the counter. The tide was very high so what would normally be part of the car park was submerged in water.



Flooded Blakeney car park

After that we had another quick check for the reported Garganey on the marsh at Salthouse but it was nowhere to be seen. We then moved off for a look at Gramborough Hill and parked up at the car park at 9.20am. I always think that this place would be brilliant for migrants but we've never found anything there....but you never know.



Gramborough Hill bushes

We saw our first **Stock Dove** of the trip, which made us wonder why the numbers of these birds seemed to have plummeted. Walking over towards the hill were loads of Wheatears again but also a pair of **Stonechat** and I found a **Water Pipit** amongst the Meadow Pipits. With nothing

else about we headed off at 10.02am preparing ourselves for our monster walk. On the way back to the car a Billy Big-Balls Birder approached us and patronized us with a load of guff. After he said nothing was about I mentioned the Water Pipit to which he stuttered and stumbled, "Errrr, oh really, errrr, nice find, whereabouts?" After pointing him in the direction of the bird we tootled off feeling quite good that we had put one over on a smug birder :).

We felt anything but enthusiastic as we parked up in the car park and looked down the shingle beach towards Blakeney Point. Half Way House looked miles away (it literally is!) and the rest seemed impossible but it had to be done if we stood any chance of seeing a Bluethroat or hopefully finding something ourselves. Inland there were plenty of black clouds threatening to burst at any time and Wendy's face said it all about our feelings for this location.



Depressed at Blakeney point

We set off at 10.28am across the monotonous shingle ridge, which stretched for approximately 4 characterless miles ahead of us. It takes a while for 'shingle feet' to kick in but when you finally find the method it makes walking a lot easier. There were some **Sandwich Terns** feeding along the shoreline and a good number of **Small Copper** Butterflies flitting about amongst the vegetation. The weather was weird and although it looked like it was going to rain, every now and then the sun would pop out. When it did the temperature soared so our coats and gloves were on and off more times than a Peel girls pants in a night. We'd reached Half Way House by 11.17am and like last time we saw this as a good place to sit down to have a drink. We sat down but suddenly realised that there were people staying in the house. It looked like some women had thought it a good idea to bring a large group of kids there! From inside there was a lot of shouting going on and outside the barefooted children gathered around us as if they were from a remote tribe who'd never seen another human being before. The others were lining up the collection of shells they'd gathered, in a slightly OCD fashion, on the ground. There really doesn't seem to be anything else to do there (the place is totally desolate) but who knows, they may have had hundreds of fun filled activities in store for them :/. One of the adults then emerged from the house, filled up a bucket of water from the water butt and disappeared into the extremely grim looking outside toilet.....what fun! Sometimes there's a fine line between character building and soul destruction and this seemed to be swaying towards the latter :P.

The sky was growing darker and it had started to rain so we thought it would be best to get going, as we were only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way into the walk. The Bluethroat had been seen at the section

between The Hood and Long Hills, which wasn't too far away and we were soon there, scanning the bushes and Sueda. By now the drinks we'd had early had taken effect so we set about finding a quiet corner out of view. I was first while Wendy kept a look out in case another Birder popped up from somewhere and then we swapped. While I watched out for her I spotted a bird, OMG it was actually a bird! It wasn't exactly the Bluethroat we were after but a stunning male Redstart so I called it out to Wendy who was in a bit of a compromising position and couldn't stand up to look. Luckily it stuck around so she had time to compose herself and get great views of it too. It was completely impossible to approach though so I only managed an extremely distant record shot.



Common Redstart

From there and all the way to the Plantation at the point we saw nothing, literally, and like last time we'd realized that we were wasting our time. Bill Oddie once said that all you need to do is sit down and stare at the Plantation and the birds will start appearing from nowhere even though it appears empty. We tested this theory last time to no avail and this time was practically the same.



The Plantation

There were a few Chiffchaffs and a couple of Robins but that was it! Bill must've been there in the good old days when there were actually some birds about! We looked round and saw a guy walking towards us pointing to the sky so we looked up and saw another Hobby blasting overhead. We overheard a couple of blokes talking about a Whinchat and a Redstart they'd seen but we'd heard nothing on the Bluethroat so resigned ourselves to the fact that it had gone. After wandering about in the rain and using the very handy W.C's we packed up our stuff and prepared for the 4mile journey back. Just past the Plantation we found a pair of Whinchat and another male Redstart, which I thought I'd try and get some pics of. The Redstart was certainly not up for a photo shoot and wasn't going to settle anywhere but the Whinchat was seemingly more obliging. When it dropped out of sight I took my time and crept up on it behind the ridge hoping for it to pop up within a photographable range. It had been sitting in a dip and if my plan worked I'd have my best ever Whinchat shot.....sorted :). To my horror it eventually popped up but it had moved much further away and when it spotted me it was off in a flash. I did manage to get some record shots though but that wasn't what I was hoping for.....Grrrrrrr!



Whinchat

We left at 1.45pm and luckily the tide was out by then which meant that our walk back was going to be much easier. The beach was now exposed and sand is 100 times easier to walk on than shingle so it would take us half the time....Phew! We thought we'd give The Hood another look just in case the Bluethroat had miraculously reappeared. Yeah right!

We found some Warblers, which were sculking deep in the bushes but with them was something else. We had no idea what it was but were adamant we'd pin it down for a better view. The birds were well hidden but would fly between Sueda every now and again. We stood with our eyes glued to the bush we'd seen the bird in question move to but it wasn't budging. We positioned ourselves at either side to give at least one of us a chance if it flew again. Another Birder was approaching and without saying a word he also moved in on the bush. He could obviously sense we weren't muppets and knew we wouldn't be looking this intently if it was anything normal. This was very helpful of him and we now had the little **** surrounded. I explained to him what we'd seen which was basically a brownish featureless Sylvia type Warbler, which he knew could mean something good. After about 15minutes enough was enough, the bird had beaten us so we all backed off and we thanked the bloke for helping out before going our separate ways. This would never happen with a random stranger at home in the I.O.M! Motoring our way along the beach (getting soaked from showers every 5 minutes) we stopped to watch the huge number of Swifts streaming in off the sea and also noticed 3 x Whimbrel as they left land behind them and flew out to sea, vanishing into the distance.....vis mig or what?



Blakeney point shingle

A large flock of waders came hurtling up the shoreline and landed just ahead of us and although the flock mainly consisted of **Dunlin**, amongst them were some **Sanderling**. I then spotted a **Common Seal**, which made us laugh as it totally looked like it was doing breast stroke :D.

We were back at the car, soaking wet by 3.22pm and comparing our shingletastic 8mile walk to the last time we didn't think it'd been as difficult as we'd remembered. We don't know if it was because we'd set off without the horror stories we'd heard before actually doing it or just that we knew what to expect 2nd time round. Whatever, due to the total lack of birds we concluded that we wouldn't bother again unless if it was for something pretty special :P. Wendy thought she deserved a proper W.C and a coffee after that so we went to the Café at Cley Visitor Centre. It was only 3.30pm and we had time to chill out so we went inside and sat in for a change. We left at 4.02pm and still with time on our hands we thought we'd try for the Temmincks Stints again and headed straight for Bishops Hide.

By this time it was absolutely freezing and sitting down wasn't going to help much but hey ho. The first thing we noticed was that the Little Gull was still there, doing a circuit around the pool and straight past the hide so the cameras were working on overdrive. Then out of nowhere an adult summer plumage Med Gull flew in which neither of us had seen before. Wendy managed to get some pics while it was there, as it didn't stick around.



Mediterranean Gull

She also managed to pin down the 2 x **Temmincks Stints**, which were as usual miles away so we grabbed some record shots while we could. We've only ever seen these birds from a distance and didn't expect anything else and Wendy was getting ants in her pants. She was wanting to go but in a Zen moment I said, "Be calm I think they'll come closer." Sure enough they kindly flew from miles away to a bit nearer so we could just about get our best ever view. We were quite happy with this and carried on taking pics to better the ones we already had but slowly (we're talking mega snails pace slow here btw) they began to work their way down the muddy edge towards us. We carried on trying to get better shots until we realized that Wendy's camera battery was running on low :/. She had to stop and wait to see what would happen next. Either these birds would carry on and make it to the front of the Hide or they'd fly and disappear! Unbelievably they carried on coming towards us and one of them even decided to have a quick nap while the other kept on feeding nearby. Everyone in the Hide was by now commenting on how close they were and we all sat holding our breath to see what would happen. After the lazy one had woken up and got back into gear they looked spooked for a moment but soon carried on their way round the edge of the pool.....towards us :O. This as it stood was pretty cool and patience was definitely paying off but the birds ended up so close we didn't even need bins, they were down to within 13.5 metres! Being in front of the hide meant that they were partially hidden by the slight bank so it was difficult to get them into view between tufts of grass but we managed to get some shots we were happy with, despite the poor light.



Temminck's Stint

We then realized that our hands and feet had died with the cold and our bums were numb from sitting on a hard wooden bench for too long so we called it a day. When we got back to the car we checked the time, it was 5.50pm and we were freezing and very hungry. We couldn't be bothered with the hassle of cooking so aimed straight for our old favourite the "Dun Cow" Pub in Salthouse :). Slightly thrown by the change of menu (I knew exactly what I wanted but they didn't do it anymore) we had a really nice meal, thawed out and went away happy.

We arrived back at H.Q at 6.51pm and noticed that the car next door wasn't there wahey :). I then received a notification of a Wryneck from a field just next to where we'd been stuffing our faces....Aarghhhh! I was totally up for it so went straight back out while Wendy decided to treat herself for a change after a hard day and turned the Jacuzzi function on in the bath. Seconds later she could feel something pulling on her hair and realized that the Jacuzzi was trying to eat it! The damage wasn't apparent until later when she tried to brush her wet hair only to find a massive matted mess in her brush.....Eeeek!

Before I left I got every bit of Techno map (Memory map, Motiongpx, Google maps etc) I could to pinpoint where the Wryneck had been seen and set off happy that I knew where to look. When arriving I was 4th car there and we were already having to just dump our cars on the verge at the side of the road. I got out and the blokes who were there asked me where I thought we should look! Obviously I must have the look of a Super Birder (or super nerd :-\) but I said I didn't think it was where they were looking and it was more likely to be about 100 yards up the field (coming from the preplanning I did). They all seemed to believe and trust me and with that we all walked off. There was one bloke in front of me as we went round a corner where he froze solid and I nearly walked into the back of him. He said, "Wryneck has just flushed off the path in front of us." I was literally 3 feet behind this bloke and didn't see it. So we stood there and waited hoping it would reappear. By now the crowd had risen to about 20 people but it was all well mannered unlike in Suffolk! After 20 minutes the Wryneck jumped back onto the path with its back to us and flew instantly so I got about a 5 second view. Again we waited for 20 minutes but there was no sign and no one was wanting to go chasing after it and harrying it, which was really nice to see, so everyone dispersed. So great to see another Wryneck and really interesting

to see the type of habitat they frequent on migration, that will all come in handy when we are trying to find one in the Isle of Man.

I returned home absolutely freezing and very tired so needless to say we were in bed early and out like lights and best of all the neighbours didn't come back :).

Tuesday 8th May

Despite the previous day Wendy was up at 5.50am and ready to go! It was raining outside and we had no major plans so I didn't get up until 6.45am.....much more civilized :P. Wendy went outside for a look as usual and was pleased to hear a Cuckoo calling from trees above the fields. We were stumped as to what to wear as it was forecasting to be quite warm but showery. When Wendy went to put her boots on she noticed that some of the stitching had come away and she now had a neat hole in them. The grass would be soaking so they'd be no good so it was waterproofs and Snow Boots again hahaha. A report of a Channel Wagtail had come in, so that would be our first plan of the day so we left at 8.03am and headed straight for Cley.

We arrived at the Eye Field at 8.10am and had a scan to see if the bird was still around. There were a few Yellow Wags but amongst them we finally found the very smart looking **Channel Wagtail**. It was way too far off to get any pics but we took advantage of the nearby Wheatears and got some pretty good shots of them instead. Wendy managed to get this very nice one.



Wheatear

We then decided to take a walk over to the North Hide across the shingle, which after Blakeney Point yesterday, was the last thing we fancied walking on.....Grrrrrr! Looking out to sea there was only a couple of **Eiders** and some more Sanderling feeding on the shoreline. Everything is miles away from the Hide itself but we could see a Med Gull, an adult summer Little Gull and 4 x Spoonbills. We hadn't planned on sticking around for long though and were back at the car by 9.07am. Although we've never found anything decent there we thought we'd give Walsey Hills NOA the once over seeing as we'd be passing by. We parked up at 9.18am and made our way through the archway of trees onto the footpath. Another Cetti's Warbler blasting out from the bushes was impossible to miss as was the stinking pile of human poo with bits of used toilet roll

next to it.....Bleurrghhh! It was literally just next to the road and in a heavily birded area so whoever the culprit was must've been in real trouble! Moving swiftly away from that we trotted off down the path and saw absolutely nothing again apart from our first **Bullfinch** of the trip. By then both of us needed to empty our bladders, so after Wendy had successfully accomplished her mission it was my turn. No sooner had I got into position but a Birder appeared on the path right below me.....NOT AGAIN! If I kept my run of bad luck up I was sure I'd get myself arrested for indecent exposure sooner or later :/. We decided that there was no point hanging around so headed off to Cley East Bank.



View towards Cley from East bank

Walking along the path we heard a Cuckoo which sounded like it was coming from Walsey Hills where we'd left just minutes ago. We were amazed at how many Cetti's Warblers we could hear and when we stopped and waited our patience paid off and as they flew between bushes we were able to see them too. Unfortunately none of them wanted to sit out in the open for even a second to allow us to get any pics but it was brilliant to have both finally had good views of them. Sedge Warblers were also in abundance but that was nothing compared to the black swarms of Hawthorn Flies. They were everywhere! We had them on our clothing, in our hair (hmmm probably not mine) and flying in our faces....yuk! We've got nothing against these flies but if given the choice would rather not breathe them in! It was getting quite warm by then and we decided to go back to the Wryneck spot from the evening before.

We parked up at the layby at 10.34am and headed up the track sweating in the blazing sunshine. We weren't the only ones there and another Birder had had the same idea.



Wryneck hill

The increase in temperature had not only caused the Hawthorn Fly eruption but everywhere we looked there were Ladybirds. We also found another Holly Blue Butterfly but as expected there was no sign of the Wryneck so we turned back.

Wendy's next caffeine fix was due and luckily we were near Cley Visitor Centre and the Café there is a favourite. She soon had her Cappuccino as well as a freshly baked cheese scone while I'd gone for a huge slab of flapjack.....Yummy :). We sat in the car park as usual looking out over the marshes but we were soon distracted by a couple, in their late 50's, parked up in front of us. It was all too apparent that they were having a right old ding-dong while he was standing outside and she was sitting in the passenger seat. To cut a long story short he was swearing blind that he'd have been quite happy to stay longer but she had a face on her like thunder, was having none of it and was flinging her arms about. We nearly split our sides at the finale, when he said in a very posh voice, "Stop it, you're spoiling everything!" She ended up in tears and they drove off shortly after. Looked like a good time was had by all.....not :P. Entertainment over we wondered where to go next as although it was really warm it was also raining again....Urrghhhh!

As there'd been a big influx of Yellow Wags and Ring Ouzels we decided to check Kelling Water Meadows out. The best thing we've ever seen there (on numerous attempts) was a Hobby but it always has reports of something interesting.....when we're not there! When we arrived at our usual car park we were a bit thrown by the new signage, which read, "Private, farm vehicles only." That scuppered our plans so we carried on to the Tea Rooms car park which was very full and also had a sign which basically said, "If you're not a customer **** Off!" Ah well, we could always say that we'd gone for a quick walk before we'd intended on going to the Tea Rooms if anyone asked :P. On the footpath was a nice male Bullfinch and Whitethroats everywhere. We stopped to try for some pics but again failed miserably and carried on over to the shallow pools in the cow fields. There was another quick rain shower and as usual there was nothing about so we gave it up as a bad job. We were back at the car by 12.40pm and made a quick get away as the Tea Room was full but there was now nowhere for any more customers to park.

As it was just round the corner we wanted to go and see if the Dartford Warblers were about at Kelling Heath. Luckily it had stopped raining by the time we pulled up in the car park at

12.44pm and it was absolutely boiling so we quickly ate our lunch and headed off. We'd literally been walking for 5 minutes when the heavens opened so we stopped to shelter under the trees.



Kelling heath

I then got a notification about a Yellow-browed Warbler and Ring Ouzel at Wells Woods so we both agreed that we'd knock Kelling on the head and try again the next day. We left at 1.19pm and thought we'd drive past Salthouse Heath, which is apparently a good spot to listen out for Nightingale. Needless to say (with our run of bad luck) that when we parked up at 12.54pm we heard nothing! The rain had become so bad that there was only thing for it....to abandon the Wells Woods plan and head for the shelter of the Hides at Cley!

We arrived at 2.30pm and sat down hoping to at the very least stay dry. There was a Pintail outside the Hide, which was just a bit too far away for pics but unfortunately not much else of note.



Cley

We moved to the Hide next door and right in front of the hide was an Avocet feeding. I took the opportunity to get a pic as my previous Avocet shots weren't the best but with the light being so poor this one wasn't much better...Doh!



Avocet

Just to add insult to injury as soon as the Avocet cleared off the sun came out.....Grrrrrrr!
Elsewhere from this hide were all the usual suspects plus a smart male summer plumage Ruff. A

flock of Dunlin flew in and landed near the back of the pool on an Island and amongst them was a wader without a black belly. It was too far away to get any other details to confirm our suspicions but being 99% sure we patiently waited for them to fly. There were a few Common and **Little Terns** out on the Island too. Having sat for well over 30mins we were now getting twitchy, as the rain had stopped, and wanted to leave but not before I.Ding that wader first though! I finally plucked up the courage to ask an old bearded guy if I could use his scope to check it out and luckily he was very nice and also interested. The other old blokes in the hide were of the opinion nothing was about so he gave me the go ahead. That confirmed our suspicions that it was a **Curlew Sandpiper** and the old bloke was a bit shocked by the (relatively) young tourists showing the old locals how it's done. We were certainly doing the Isle of Man Birders reputations proud but best of all we could finally leave! Wendy couldn't resist getting a photo of the cute (in an ugly way) baby Coots that were just outside the hide before we left. Awwwww :).



Baby Coots

Although it was 4.15pm and getting quite late we were sure we could squeeze somewhere else in to the day.

At 4.38pm we arrived back at Kelling Heath for round 2 and the weather was much better. We felt more optimistic this time round and it wasn't long before we'd found a pair of **Stonechats**. Surely the Dartford Warblers would be skulking around close behind them? We'd remembered this bit of precious information, which had been handed down to us from us by a bloke we'd spoken to a couple of years ago. As we turned a corner who should be standing there but the very same guy! He monitors the area on a daily basis out of pure love for the place and knows all there is to know about Kelling Heath. He again came over and as we got chatting he told us that there were 2 x Turtle Doves and Woodlark around somewhere. He also said that the Dartfords were breeding and that although he'd not seen any for ages he had heard them. Apparently there was a non-breeding male doing the rounds but it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. He then surprised us by saying, "Your best bet is to listen for them and I know you know the call as we've met before." We couldn't believe that after all that time and the amount of people he must've talked to since he'd actually remembered us! While we were

chatting Wendy heard then spotted a **Woodlark** high up in the sky and by then we'd been joined by another couple of Birders. While they were all engrossed in conversation, we thanked the guy once again and left as the sky was turning a distinct shade of black. We got back to the car at 5.26pm feeling pretty tired and hungry so we called it a day.

We were finally at H.Q by 6pm and after tea, while Wendy was soaking in the bath, I decided I was too tired to go out. This was the first time I'd stayed in after tea and typically the first time it had been a nice sunny evening. I hoped I wouldn't live to regret my decision but I really needed a night off as I still hadn't snapped out of the feeling of being a boat! The cottage had been quite cold but as the temperature had risen so it was actually too warm. If we'd known it was going to be a hot day I certainly wouldn't have worn base layers and Wendy definitely wouldn't have worn her snow boots even though her others had a hole in them. As I was sitting watching some T.V something caught my eye. A Great-spotted Woodpecker on the trees outside the window.....nice :). As usual though by the time we'd grabbed our cameras it had gone!

Wednesday 9th May

We were up at 6.40am and had no set plan for the day, as the forecast wasn't looking good. It looked quite bright outside when we pulled back the curtains but about half an hour later the rain started. We knew that it was going to be another wet day so we'd just have to make the most of it. There were always the Stately Homes that the owner of the Cottage had suggested to us (not) and better still would be the mega expensive Sea Life Centre in our favourite dump, Hunstanton :(Joking aside we settled on Wells Woods a) because of the reports which had come in the day before b) it's about the nearest thing to a roof you can get outside and c) hopefully even the birds would also want to stay dry and use it as shelter for the day. First though we wanted to give Friary Hills another look so we set off, in our waterproofs at 8.35am. I then received a notification of a Scandinavian Grey-headed Wagtail at the Eye Field so we quickly changed our plan and went straight there.

We were at the Eye Field by 8.43am and scanning through the Yellow Wags in search of our bird. We weren't alone as there was a guy with a scope who'd beaten us to it and also more cars of people arriving behind us. We asked the guy with the scope if it was still around and he gave us the most dreadful directions I think we've ever heard! It went something like, "Can you see the cow pat?" Err.....yes we could but there were a thousand cow pats out there :-\ . Surely he could've been more to the point? We found it anyway but nowhere near where he was saying and had Ok views of a **Grey-headed Wagtail**, which is the Scandinavian race of Yellow Wagtail. This was the 2nd day in row that an interesting Wagtail had turned up in the field and although we couldn't tick them or claim them as lifers, unless we used the Dutch list method, they were still new and very interesting birds to us. The bloke from 'Birding World' was mega close to it and obviously getting great shots but we hung back with the local Birders and I just got a distant record shot.



Grey-headed Wagtail

There were also 4 x Spoonbills over in one of the pools in the distance and we realized that we'd seen more of these birds on this trip than on any of the others put together. We'd seen what we'd gone for so there seemed no point sticking around so we were back in the car at 8.58am.

Back on track we were at Friary Hills by 9.04am and walking our usual route along the footpath. This time we walked right to the end then back up round the top but we couldn't find anything.



Friary hills

Nothing else had dropped in so we gave up and trudged back. Just as we passed the big Sycamore we noticed two birds hopping around at the bottom. It was two Lesser Whitethroats and as they were more in the open than we'd ever see them at home we both tried for a photo. Unfortunately the light under the canopy was terrible and the best I could manage was this shot. This was such a shame as with some light on them it would have given us the chance of something really good.



Lesser Whitethroat

After that we were back at the car by 9.50am. We were going to have to look elsewhere and further afield if we were going to see anything different before going home. This plan would have to wait though as it was already too late in the day to be heading to the other end of Norfolk so we decided to head back to Kelling to deal with some unfinished business. Getting our priorities in order though Wendy had to visit Cley Deli first to pick up some more pressies, some weird veggies to make tea out of and that all too important caffeine fix she was craving.

Caffeine levels sorted and enthusiasm running high we were at Kelling Heath for round 3 at 10.30am. After walking into the 'interesting zone' we were soooo pleased to see 2 x **Turtle Doves**. This was brilliant as I'd thought we might be too early in the year for these and also knowing that they had survived the massacre going through Malta. We then hit the area, which was burned to a crisp 2 years ago, and couldn't believe how green it was even since we'd been there last year. I thought this area was looking great but we found out that the Silver Birch saplings growing were extremely bad news for the heath and they had plans in place to kill the lot! I thought a good idea would be to dig them up and bring them back to the Isle of Man to replace all our useless Sycamores!



Kelling Heath rejuvenated area

Scanning the area I noticed a bird sitting on the charred remains of a bush and was amazed to see a **Woodlark**. This was the best view of a Woodlark we'd both ever had so we stopped to try for some pics. Record shots were all that were possible but definitely better than nothing!



Woodlark

We weren't at all surprised to yet again bump into the Oracle of Kelling Heath who came over for a chat. He'd still not seen any Dartfords again so I asked if he'd seen any Adders as they are

an animal we'd both been dying to see for years. Cool as a cucumber he replied with, "Oh yes I've seen two this morning already." He looked at his watch, told us he had 30 minutes to spare and lead us off to his favourite spot.....OMG! He took us to the spot where a female had been basking earlier but there was nothing and said he knew of another place. He took us over to the next spot and again crept his way along the edge of the field whilst we waited a fair distance back. Unfortunately this produced nothing as well but at least he'd tried to help us out of his own time and just for the love of it too.....such a friendly and helpful man. During our walk with him he gave us so much useful information about Adders it was untrue and we felt pretty confident in being able to find one ourselves by the end of it. We'd also briefly spoken to another guy who can be best described as the 'Keith of Kelling' and not wanting to give up on the Dartfords we hung around and got chatting to him. He was yet again another really friendly and helpful bloke and gave us another site for Adder nearby. He told us to walk up a footpath through Bodham Wood early morning and said he frequently sees half a dozen or so at the side of the track. If Kelling didn't produce the goods we'd have to give it a go. We thanked him before we eventually left empty handed on the Dartford Warbler/Adder front, but having had pretty good views of Woodlark and seeing Turtle Dove we couldn't complain. We were back at the car at 12.28pm and made a quick visit to Cley Visitor Centre for Wendy's next caffeine top up and a quick bite to eat which brought us to 1pm so we headed off to Wells.

Parking up at Wells Woods car park at 1.24pm I was adamant that we'd find 'The Dell' this time around. I'd lost count of how many times we'd been there, thought we had found it but actually hadn't. The weather was again looking dubious but we kept our fingers crossed that it would stay dry. As we passed some fields at the side of the footpath I spotted 2x Grey Partridge and they were close. I started taking some pics as I didn't have a photo of a Wild Grey Partridge but then I realized there were more and they were even closer.....very nice. I'd only brought Wendy's camera so while I was firing off the shots Wendy was hopping next to me saying, "Give us a go, give us a go!" We both ended up with some good ones which was a good job as we couldn't be sure when we'd get that close again.



Grey Partridge

We wandered our way round to where the main path breaks off into the trees and followed it for a while. As if by magic we found ourselves standing looking at a large group of Birch trees in amongst the Pines.....THE DELL?! It had to be, at long last we'd actually found it.....at least we think we did. This place had caused us so much confusion and doubt on all our previous visits that we'd given up on ever finding the right spot.



This is definitely the Dell!

The directions given for the Yellow-browed Warbler from the day before seemed good....if you know your trees! We were standing in front of a tree, which we didn't recognize and there were definitely some Warblers in it somewhere. We could hear them and also see small shapes moving through the branches deep inside. On my phone I googled the type of tree only to find that we'd unknowingly hit the right tree and just by pure fluke too. After standing staring at it for about 30minutes the best we could come up with was Willow Warbler and Blackcap....Grrrrr! Unfortunately there wasn't much else going on in The Dell itself either but we did come across a Muntjac, which quickly scarpered off the path and into the dense undergrowth ahead of us. There was loads of midgies too but no other people around so I grabbed the opportunity for an al fresco W.C break. After finding a suitably well, hidden corner I carried out my mission only to see the tops of human heads over the bushes right in front of me.....unbelievable! I'd only gone for a spot next to the main path.....just my luck :/. We were back at the car for 3.05pm and with the weather yet again looking dodgy we headed home.

We arrived back at H.Q at 4.15pm just in time for the heavens to open and it absolutely chucked it down. We'd been really lucky to have dodged the worst of the weather and now be indoors and dry. It had been another warm day though so ditching the base layers had been a good move.

Even though it was raining I had the urge to go out again after tea. I tried the Eye field again just in case the Grey-headed Wagtail was closer to the road but not only was that not there but neither were any Yellow Wagtails either.....Booo. I then went off to Cley again with the intention of seeing if I could get a pic of the annoying Little Gull, even though the light was worse than ever! Just outside the hide I heard a Cetti's blasting out its song again so I stopped and stared. I then spotted something move much, much, closer than where I'd been looking and unbelievably there was the Cetti's on a branch sitting still only 8metres away! Doubly lucky was that I'd set

my camera up before setting off (which I normally forget to do) so I was able to bring my camera up and fire off 5 shots instantly. I was so happy to have finally got a Cetti's photo and one much better than I could've ever hoped for.



Cetti's Warbler

I managed to follow the bird and get shots for the next 10 minutes but none of them matched my first shots so I carried on into the hide. Unfortunately the hide was very quiet so I didn't spend too long in there and headed off home quite quickly, still buzzing from the Cetti's experience though!

We'd actually remembered to bring the Bat Box away with us this time so Wendy thought she'd better give it a whirl at least once during the holiday. She didn't hold much hope though thinking it was far too windy but surprisingly she located some behind the Cottage. They were flying between the old barn and a row of conifers, which presumably made an excellent wind break!

Thursday 10th May

Wendy was up and raring to go at 5.26am even though it was blowing a gale and throwing it down. I had a lie in and surfaced at 6.30am which OK isn't late but it's not stupid o'clock :P. Our first plan was to go back to Kelling in a last ditch attempt to see Adder and Dartford Warbler and the earlier the better. By the time we left at 7.48am it was brightening up and an acceptable 16.5C but it also looked like more rain clouds were on their way. We took a quick detour first to the Eye Field again but after all the Wagtail action of the past couple of days there was nothing there just like the previous evening.

We parked up at Kelling Heath at 8.09am and made a beeline for the spot we'd been shown for the basking Adder. We crept our way very slowly and carefully along the edge of the field wondering how we'd spot one in amongst all the dry bracken, surely they'd be too well camouflaged in that lot? Wendy had moved on further when out of nowhere, it was my turn to

have Eagle eyes for once, suddenly I saw it plain as day and whispered, "Adder!" Wendy came straight over and I raised the camera and started firing off some shots while I had the chance. The snake was curled up so not in the best position and just as I went to hand the camera over to Wendy it shot into the bushes at lightening speed never to be seen again. This was the second lifer for us both though and a lot easier to find than we'd thought. Wendy had been desperately trying to get me to give her the camera, so she wasn't best pleased that it had gone without her being able to get a photo. Bad Pete!



Adder

While all that was going on a Turtle Dove flew over, so they were still about, and it was feeling really warm despite the wind. Fortunately it looked like the rain was going hold off for a while at least so we called it a day and walked back to the car. We'd seen an Adder, which was brilliant, but were quite disappointed that yet again we'd not seen the Dartford Warblers as we both have a bit of a soft spot for them :(We left at 9.23am and as there was now very little happening locally on the bird front we thought we'd better go further afield so I'd made a loose plan. First we'd go to Winterton Dunes, which is good for migrants then we'd visit a new place, one of the Broads Reserves I'd read about to chance our luck for some early Dragon/Damselflies. Driving through Sheringham we saw a **Carrion Crow** and past a sign for 'Snaefell Park'.....surely no connection to our Snaefell? The temperature in the car was reading 18C so we were hopeful for some nice weather but Wendy was getting worried. It looked like it could rain earlier on in the day so she didn't want to risk her holey boots and had worn her snow boots again.....Hahahahaha :P. After a while we were getting pretty bored of the drive as Winterton is about 1 hour away from Blakeney but we both had a giggle at the sign for 'Horsey Windpump' :P.



Small things and all that.. :D

We parked up at Winterton Dunes at 10.50am and Wendy leapt out of the car and headed straight for the Café for a Cappuccino fix! Caffeine levels restored we set off to see what we could find over the road in the South Dunes.



Winterton South Dunes

I love birding here as it has a great history of amazing migrants so you know literally anything could appear. As we made our way along the path we could see that the bushes were full of activity but the birds were so deep inside them it was going to be a slow process. We stood, scanning and waiting until eventually a bird showed but after what seemed like hours all we'd

found were Blackcaps and Whitethroats.....Urrghhhh! Ok, it proved that there were migrants around but they just weren't what we were after. We saw a lovely Small Copper Butterfly, which we stopped to get pics of and another Holly Blue but that was it. By this point we'd given up on the bushes on the bank and had made our way left to look through the trees in the middle. We were just thinking about turning back when I spotted a Cuckoo sitting low down in a gorse bush. I got Wendy onto it and we both knew that we had to get some pics. As we'd gone for the lightweight option that meant fighting over the 50d/300mm combo and I still felt guilty about the Adder incident so I handed the kit to Wendy and put my full trust in her to get a decent shot. We got down low to the ground behind a bush in front of us and used it as cover while we edged our way slowly towards the bird. If it flew then we'd have just missed a golden opportunity to get some decent Cuckoo shots but skillfully the bird didn't spot us, although this was probably due to it being preoccupied by a mobbing Chaffinch. The views we were getting were brilliant but we had to get some pics as quickly as we could as a Crow had taken over from the small finch giving the Cuckoo more of a run for it's money. The Cuckoo very predictably got totally sick of the hassle, like you would, and flew off but not before Wendy managed to get some shots that we were very happy with :).



Cuckoo

Happy with what we'd seen and realizing that we weren't going to better it we turned round and headed back to the car. We kind of hoped that we'd re-find the Cuckoo on the way but there was no sign so it looked like it had cleared right off. We were back at the car at 12pm so we decided to eat our lunch before giving the North Dunes a go. There'd been a report of a Ring Ouzel at the pools the day before and even though we weren't optimistic we thought we'd at least try it.....you never know. On the other hand there's always the line, should've known better! We walked and walked over the surprisingly barren and lifeless dunes seeing absolutely no sign of any pools anywhere, it was totally dry. Very depressing....



Barren!

It was now a very warm 20C so Wendy's feet were starting to protest about being put in massive, heavy snow boots. It was so warm we had to take our coats off as we trudged our way over the sand and we realized that we were wasting our time and energy so eventually gave up. A flock of 4 x Yellow Wags flew over us but there was nothing else so we decided to head back over the top of the dunes along the beach. There was a nice little dense area of small bushes so I saw it as a good place for a much needed W.C break, nobody would see me there so I'd be safe.....for a change. With my run of bad luck I should've known better and as I made my way through the bushes I nearly leapt out of my skin when a snake shot off the path right in front of my foot...Aarghhhhh! Adders are one of Winterton's specialities (as well as Natterjack Toad) and I'd just unwittingly come across one. I made a quick U turn and ran straight back out squeeling like a girl! I'd never seen an Adder until that morning so I hadn't expected to see a second in the same day! Now I'm not scared of snakes, I used to have a pet Garter Snake called Jake, but this one had just taken me by total surprise. There was only one thing for it I'd just have to hold on until we got back to the more civilized public toilets back at the car park. Walking over the top of the dunes and looking out across the beach we could see streams of House and Sand Martins piling in off the sea and heading inland....Cool. We also had a look at the 2nd largest Little Tern Colony in Britain but to be honest it wasn't as impressive as we'd imagined it to be. Our one in the Isle of Man seems to have more activity, that's until they've been disturbed so much they abandon for good! We'd hoped to maybe see some lizards along the track but we didn't, possibly due to it being too late in the day or disturbance from dog walkers. After finally visiting the W.C we got back to the car and Wendy heaved a sigh of relief as her roasting feet were now throbbing in her boots. The first thing she did was to take them straight off and as we drove

away at 1.45pm she stuck both her feet out of the open window to cool them down which provoked some very strange looks from passing motorists!

With Wendy's feet recovered and cooled we arrived at Alderfen Broad at 2.17pm and it was back on with the snow boots. Locating Alderfen was an art in itself with no signs at all, even when we were actually at the track to the Fen! Looking down the track made me wish I had a Range Rover, it was deeply rutted, muddy and flooded in places so not exactly the terrain a low hot hatch is built for!



Uh oh...

The potholes were massive but it was impossible to tell how deep they were as they were filled with water from all the rain we'd had recently. Wendy was telling me that if I got stuck I'd just have to back out but I went with the 'it'll be fine' theory! As we bounced, slid and swerved our way down I could hear the middle of the track scraping against the bottom of the car and realized that if I got stuck we would be properly stuckUh oh :/. Fortunately it looked worse than it was and my skillz learnt from years of playing Rally games on the xbox paid off as I managed to keep the power on whilst controlling the constant back end slides! We finally made it all the way to the car park where I could breathe a sigh of relief and check for any damage on the front splitter. Pleased that my car was still intact we had a look around and straight away there was a Jay at the side of the track. We could see the place looked brilliant for Dragon/Damselflies and Butterflies.....a bit later in the season! The only Dragonfly we stood any chance of seeing was a Hairy Dragonfly, which would be a lifer for us both. There were 2 paths we could take, one was through reed beds and pools and the other through woodland so we chose the reed bed one first.



Alderfen Broad

We'd only walked 200yds, if that, when we saw something fly up from the side of the path. If we'd blinked we'd have missed it but it turned out to be 2 x **Hairy Dragonflies**! We tried to find them again but they'd totally disappeared so we carried on hoping to find more, further on. With the warm damp conditions the midgies were out in force but thankfully they didn't seem interested in us for once. We knew it was too early in the year for anything else but could see that a month down the line it would definitely be worth a visit. All of sudden I jumped and shrieked, "Snake!" when I saw a **Grass Snake** shooting off the track and into the reeds ahead of me. I was still a bit freaked out from Winterton Dunes and although an Adder can inflict a nasty bite the Grass Snake was totally harmless. I'm sure the snakes of Norfolk were out to give me a heart attack! Wendy was gutted that she hadn't seen it so I moved her in front to be 'lead scout' or was that just an excuse? :). After about only 50 yards Wendy shrieked, "Snaaaaaaake!" and she jumped up in the air! Hahahaha :P. After the initial shock and knowing that they were around we calmed down which was a good job because by the time we'd got back to the car we'd seen 6 Grass Snakes in total.....brilliant!

We noticed there was a little track to a viewing platform that overlooked the Broad so we headed off down that, we didn't get very far when Wendy said, "Oooo Blue Damselfly." My ears pricked up at this because being so early in the season there was a good chance of it being an Azure Damselfly, which would be a lifer for both of us. Azures are mega common throughout the UK but amazingly there isn't one confirmed record from the Isle of Man so it's one we really wanted to see. Sure enough this Damselfly had the tell tale black U on the back and quite thin blue lines on the Thorax so I got a bad record shot and we walked off happy thinking we'd seen a new species for us. When we got back home and I'd uploaded the photo I could see on the big screen that something wasn't right. Checking the book this Damselfly met all the features of a Variable Damselfly rather than an Azure but a Variable is a lot more rare and one that I hadn't even considered. I put the photo up on Birdforum to double check as I doubted myself but within an hour several people had confirmed that it was indeed a Variable Damselfly....Wahey! :).



Variable Damselfly

We still had the woodland path to check out but the sky was looking threatening and it had started to drizzle so we hurried ourselves up. On the footpath I spotted a **Frog** in the wet grass and we spotted a lot more Damselflies although these were all Common Blue and Large Red Damselflies the same ones we get at home. Eventually the fine drizzle turned to throwing it down so we headed back towards the shelter of the car. It was only 3.35pm but the rain had put a spanner in the works so we made the decision to drive back to the Cottage. The Sat Nav estimated we'd be home at 4.40pm so it seemed like a good idea to get back early to sort everything out before leaving the next day.

We were nearly back when I got a notification reporting a Red-rumped Swallow at Cley so I put my foot down and we threw all our plans out the window. RRS is a bird I have wanted to see for a long time but never thought I would unless we went on a foreign holiday. We reached Beach Road in Cley by 4.35pm and as we pulled up 3 x Swallows flew past. We got out of the car, joined the small twitch and scanned around until 4.50pm but all we could find were Swifts and House Martins. Wendy reminded me that we needed to go so we'd have time to eat tea and pack and she was right. We left but as we were passing anyway we had a quick look at the layby that overlooked Cley Windmill as that was in the Westerly direction the 3 x Swallows we first saw had been heading in. There were no Swallows to be seen anywhere so we presumed the Red-rump had just been passing through and it was starting to rain again so we left.

Back at H.Q at 5.10pm we had loads to do so started to pack up and also prepare our tea. While we were eating at 6.20pm I received another notification saying that the bird had been seen again at Beach Road at 4.55pm.....5mins after we'd left! NOOOOOOOO! I wolfed my tea down as all I could think of was going back to Cley to give it another whirl. I've spent too much time scanning through flocks of Swallows in spring at home looking for a RRS and failed every time so couldn't ignore the fact that one was in the vicinity. After our long day Wendy decided to stay in and have a bath before finishing the packing so I grabbed my stuff and headed back, hell bent on finally seeing one. Just as I was going out the door I got another notification saying that the RRS was at Friary Hills. This made sense as Friary hills was West of Cley but best of all was that it was only 2 minutes from our Cottage. I shot straight there and walked down the path but

I remained pessimistic after our earlier experience. This soon changed when a Birder came up to me and told me it was down the end of the path, showing well! That made me leg it, even though it had been a long day and I was carrying about 7kg of equipment I ran like Usain Bolt! By the time I approached the crowd I was knackered and shaking.....Whoops! I stopped to catch my breath and took the opportunity to have a quick scan. I could see lots of hirundines over the fields with my naked eye and the first bird I clocked in the bins was amazingly a **Red-rumped Swallow**! I couldn't believe it. It was interesting to see how easy it was to pick out even at a distance. After watching for a few minutes I realized it was doing a circuit so I moved further up the path in the hope it would keep repeating it. Fortunately it did just that, which allowed me to attempt a photo. I wasn't hopeful, as I haven't even got a decent flight shot of a Swallow let alone a Red-rump! The low evening light wasn't helping matters either but I was relatively happy with how this one turned out which I got after about 5 minutes. Better than any normal Swallow shot I have!



Red-rumped Swallow

I then followed the bird up into the sky and couldn't believe my eyes when it flew right next to another one! There were 2 x Red-rumped Swallows.....absolutely crazy! There were smiles all round the twitch :). My next thought was whether I continued to try and get a decent shot or if I should give Wendy a ring to see if she wanted to come down. Being the gentleman that I am (;P) I went for the latter and ditched off taking pics but the only problem now was that I had no signal...Aarrghhhh! I ran up the hill at Friary Hills, I've no idea where I got the energy from, and tried from there but still nothing. I quickly attempted a text as well but there was nothing else for it, I'd have to bomb back to the cottage.

Wendy was in blissful ignorance until she got out of the bath and saw that she had a missed call and a text from me. She opened up my message and creased up laughing. I'd sent her a message which could easily have been misinterpreted into some kind of Dogging related issue, "Get dressed I'm coming to get you, 2 birds on feisty hill – great views." As I burst through the

Cottage Door Wendy was throwing her coat on over her PJ's, tying her soaking wet hair up and grabbing her bins. With a turnaround time Easyjet would be proud of we shot straight back down. It was a very warm evening and the sun had poked through the clouds. As we ran our way up the path we soon became aware of a slight problem. Wendy had just got out of the bath, still had wet hair and smelt of perfumed products so she was like a midgie magnet. They were all making a beeline for her head and she could feel them biting her while we stood with the small congregation of Norfolk Birders who'd gathered. The crowd was larger now but had moved further up to the end of the track. Everyone was scanning through the huge number of Swallows, House Martins and Swifts but as the flock was now a few hundred yards away nobody could find them again :(Wendy was absolutely gutted but was being eaten alive so after 15 minutes we decided we had to leave and she trudged her way back to the car feeling very deflated. Half way back I stopped at the spot where I'd first seen the bird earlier on for one last pointless scan.



Leaving the RRS twitch

I could see one Swallow over the hedge at the far end of the field so I got it in my bins and couldn't believe my luck.....I had re-found the bird! Excitedly I shouted, "Wendy, Wendy RED-RUMPED SWALLOW!!" and I frantically pointed in the direction. Wendy knew that this was her last chance so the pressure was on. "Where, where?" she was yelling while desperately trying to catch a glimpse of a white rump. Soon after she happily shrieked, "I've got it...yes!" A few other Birders nearby heard the commotion and came running up and got on to the bird. Another guy was walking up to us from the entrance gate so Wendy showed him where it was too, which he was pleased with. The crowd down at the end had also realized by now and turned to look in our direction, which was the opposite from where they'd been looking. This was very good timing as just as they did it flew really close to them and they all let out a big cheer.....hahahaha :). This was lifer number 2 for us both so we went away very happy and Wendy considered it definitely worth sacrificing some blood for.

We arrived back at H.Q at 8pm by which point it was still boiling but the wind had started to pick up again. This wasn't what we wanted for our boat journey home but is something, which seems to be predictable every time. We also discovered that we had more new neighbours who we could hear through the walls moaning about everything. Wendy finally got to dry her hair and check out all the itchy red lumps on her scalp before finishing off the packing and having a bit of time to relax before we finally crashed out.

Friday 11th May

We woke up at 6.30am and typically it was the sunniest day since we'd arrived but still very windy. As we were up so early we had to be inconveniently thoughtful of next door, which isn't easy when you're trying to drag suitcases around etc at 7am...ah well. Reluctantly we packed up the car, said, "Bye Bye" to Three Owls and drove away at 8.45am :(.



Three-owls farm

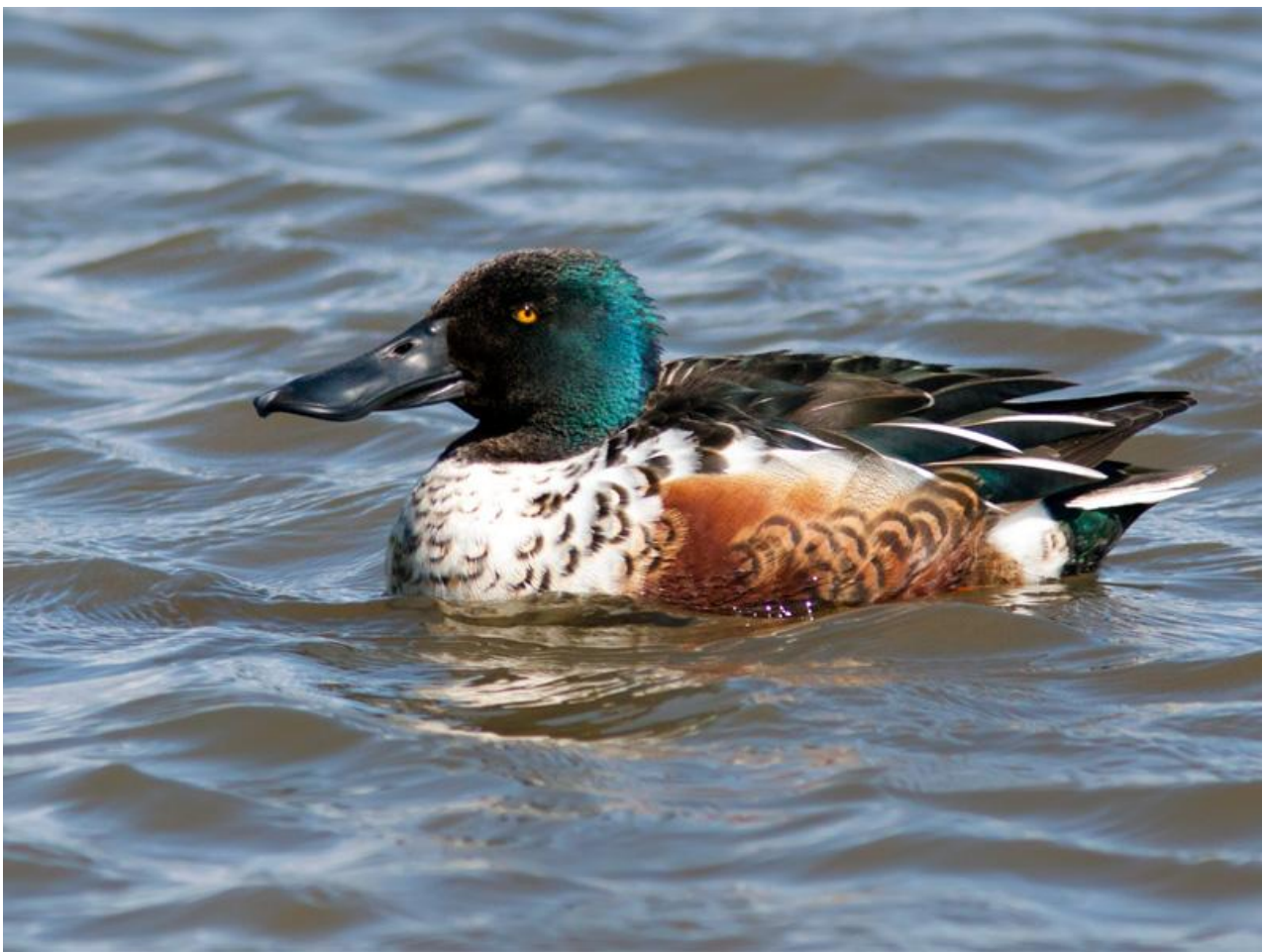
Feeling pretty depressed we started our long journey back to Heysham wishing we could stay another week but knowing that we didn't have the energy even if we'd won the lottery and could. Reality was hitting home big time but 100yards down the road we came across an opportunity we couldn't miss. We spotted a Brown Hare in a ploughed field right by the car so I slammed on the brakes and we both grabbed our cameras. We'd been watching the local Hares all week but as usual none of them were close enough for any pics and even if they were they were too spooked to stay put. We totally expected the Hare to spot us and leg it but it must've taken a chill pill somewhere along the line and carried on going about its business oblivious to our presence. Very nice :). We managed to fire off a few shots before it sprinted off up the field and we're both extremely happy with what we got. I ended up with my best ever Hare pic and Wendy certainly couldn't grumble at the results of her 1st attempt.



Brown Hare

Excitement over we headed off for our last check of the Eye Field, which yet again was dead. As Wendy didn't know where her next caffeine fix would come from I had to detour to Blakeney Deli. Weather wise it was by far the nicest day we'd had all week.....typical! On the way out of Norfolk I noticed that I only 10miles left in the tank so on the way to our first proper stop I filled up at the garage at Burnham Deepdale which was handy or we could've ended our journey back at bit prematurely.

We arrived at Titchwell at 10am and while Wendy went for a W.C break I scoured the car park bushes in the vain hope of seeing the Weasel that we saw 2 years ago. As usual it wasn't there so we trudged off towards the Visitor Centre. There'd been reports of a Spotted Flycatcher at the picnic area the day before so we had a quick look but could only find a Speckled Wood Butterfly. We headed off on the Meadow Trail as we knew there were a few Dragonfly ponds on the walk but disappointingly they were both completely dead. The same applied to the walk to the Island Hide, with only a few Cetti's singing and a couple of Swifts flying over. In the hide we quickly realized that Titchwell was back to being useless again. The water levels were so high that the lovely mud that was outside the hide in November last year was completely covered. With nothing else to do we tried to get some shots of the Swifts but that didn't go well either. Wendy then spotted a male Shoveler so got a nice shot of that.



Shoveler

There was literally nothing else to look at and we didn't fancy walking to the new Concrete Hide, which has been desperately poor every time we've been so instead we went back to the Centre where Wendy got a Coffee and I indulged in a sausage bap. Disappointed with Titchwell we left at 11.40am

Next stop was Choseley Drying Barns, which is always worth a look for Corn Bunting but on this occasion there was absolutely nothing about so we moved on to Flitcham Abbey Farm and arrived at 12.05pm. Last time we were at Flitcham the water levels were very low and the comments book was full of worries about the lack of birds. Fortunately it appeared to have sorted itself out and things looked much better. As usual we were there for one thing.....Little Owl. We read the comments book and one had been reported about an hour ago, feeding on the ground by some tree roots, so we started looking. While we sat there a couple of Grey Partridge came waddling down the bank at the side of the hide, which was an unexpected and new bird for us there. There was a Long-tailed Tit nest just outside the window in the gorse bush and the parents were frantically going in and out to feed their ever-hungry chicks. We couldn't find the Little Owl anywhere, which is quite often the case, so we gave up and left at 12.38pm as we had a bit of a drive ahead of us to get to our next stop, which was Frampton Marsh. Normally we'd be heading for Rutland water on the way to Heysham but with nothing reported there we changed the plan for another shot at the Black-winged Stilt, which was luckily still being reported most days. We had loads to fit in before we hopefully arrived at the pub in Arnside for some tea so of course we ended up getting stuck behind Tractors and slow car after slow car. We saw loads of Grey Partridge on the way and I can't remember ever seeing as many over a week as we had this time. Hopefully it's a sign that they're doing well.....unlike in the I.O.M. A slight bit of action came in the form of an Apache Gunship which was a mechanical lifer for us both :).

When we eventually got to Frampton Marsh it was 1.52pm and the temperature was only 12.5C so it felt decidedly cold especially with the strong wind. We headed straight for the Visitor Centre and while Wendy dealt with her call of nature I looked out over the pool. I then luckily overheard the nice volunteer (fit birder number 2 for me!) talking to some people and pointing

out the bird I was looking for. It didn't take long to spot it and although it was quite distant when Wendy appeared we were both very pleased to see a summer plumage **Black-necked Grebe**, which was our 3rd lifer of the trip. We went outside to try for some pics which can only be described as bad record shots but it was still a great bird and in a beautiful plumage :).



Black-necked Grebe

After that we asked about the Stilt and were told where it was last seen so we trotted off shivering as we went. On the way to the 360 Hide a birder stopped us and asked me if I was any good on Waders. I told him I wasn't bad so he showed me a photo he'd taken of a bird, which had him stumped as to its ID. After we'd discounted his thoughts I told him I thought it looked like a strange Dunlin so I agreed to go with him to check it out just in case. While we were chatting I spotted the Stilt right at the back of the nearby scrape but it lifted and flew before Wendy got a look. The bloke suggested that we went to check out his bird while Wendy went for the Stilt. Accompanied by my new bezzie mate I went off to check the bird out. He quickly found it and it was pretty distant but even after looking through the scope it was still looking strange. In the end I took a crazy mega distant shot and zoomed in on the camera screen, which showed that it was what I'd originally thought, a strange Dunlin.

While all this was going on Wendy was in the 360 Hide watching the **Black-winged Stilt** and trying to get some pics. It was too far off for anything remotely decent and just wouldn't stay still for a second but good practice for her. Its behaviour was very aggressive towards any other bird in sight so I'm sure the residents couldn't wait for it to clear off so that peace could be restored once more. It was flying around all over the place and was a humorous but freaky sight with its ridiculously long legs dangling behind it. I eventually joined her and filled her in about the weird Dunlin story. We were so pleased to have finally caught up with that Stilt after failing on our first day and it was also our 4th lifer of the trip. At one point it landed a bit closer allowing me to get an ok shot.



Black-winged Stilt

We were now racking the lifers up and on our last day too.....Hahahaha! Even though it was cold I managed to persuade Wendy to walk out to the East hide and although I'd said it wasn't far it turned out to be flipping miles away! Hahah. By the time we got there Wendy was obviously not a happy bunny, which wasn't a good start when we realized there was absolutely nothing there. We were rapidly getting even colder so we decided to get up to go. Just before I stood up I spotted two Swallows flying in from the direction of the sea. I don't know why but I checked them out and couldn't believe what I was seeing.....2 x Red-rumped Swallows!!!! I was so shocked I couldn't speak properly and just about managed to blurt out, "Wendy Wendy Red-rumped Sandpiper... Red sandpiper...errr Swallow!!!" Luckily she could tell from my panic and she got on to them without direction. The pair then proceeded to fly closer and closer till they flew past the hide about 20metres away giving us a great view. Unfortunately we'd kept the hide windows shut due to the strong wind so there was no chance of a pic but we were well chuffed anyway. My next thought was how I'd get the news out so we looked around the hide for a phone number for the Visitor Centre or something. Annoyingly there wasn't one so I had to resort to putting the news out on the Birdguides and RBA apps.

We then rushed back towards the 360 hide, where we told some of the local Birders, as the birds had been flying in their direction. Back at the Visitor Centre I told a bloke who I presumed was a RSPB worker but surprisingly he didn't seem that interested. Not being from round there I could only think that maybe they were common at Frampton? :-/. A few minutes later another guy came in to speak to the fit RSPB woman. I overheard him ask her where the RRS was and it all got a bit awkward when it became apparent that she knew nothing about it. I was pleased that the news was already out but didn't know whether to speak up or not. Luckily the not interested man said out loud, "YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO THIS MAN HERE" and pointed to me... Erk. Everyone looked at me so I tried to play it cool and calmly pointed out where we'd seen it whilst feeling like a right plank for having told the wrong person (the bloke wasn't even an RSPB worker). The RSPB women then announced that it was a great find for the reserve so I was very pleased with that. Wendy then confounded our daftness by trying to pay her coffee money to a visitor who was sitting down drinking a cup of soup, completely missing the woman wearing the tell tale RSPB T shirt! Hahaha. After all that embarrassment we quickly scuttled off and saw a

Corn Bunting next to the feeders and we left freezing at 4.24pm. Frampton Marsh has given us some great birds over the years so it might well replace Rutland Water as our best leaving location.

Our next stop was just over an hour away and we soon found ourselves heading towards some massive black clouds....Uh oh! Luckily for us we came out the other side to find blue skies again which was a bonus, as was passing a sign for 'Butts Lane' Hehehe.

We finally arrived at our last stop of the day Whisby, at 5.27pm, which was slightly later than we'd planned. We'd had to ditch it off on our first day, as we didn't have time due to all the delays, but we'd planned to squeeze it in on our way back. There was a very good reason to make the extra effort to get there though so we just hoped it would pay off. We read the reports board outside the Visitor Centre as it was all locked up for the night and headed straight onto the Coot Trail. It was a lovely evening but our energy levels were plummeting big time and we had no food with us. We dragged ourselves along the footpath with our fingers crossed that we wouldn't be leaving empty handed. We were risking a lot of time at this Reserve, which would mean we'd be too late to get any food at the Pub.



Whisby NR

Not far into the walk we heard the unmistakable sound we'd been hoping for.....**Nightingale!** :). This is a sound that never disappoints, there really is nothing else quite like it. Unfortunately, unlike last time we'd been there and seen them out in the open, this time they were totally hidden deep in the bushes so we carried on. Part of the Reserve, which we'd never been to, is on the other side of a Railway Line so we dragged ourselves up the steps and over the bridge. Unfortunately there wasn't much going on and as it was getting late and we were flagging badly we thought it would be a good idea to get going. On the walk back we came across a rather strange looking bloke walking up the path straight towards us. Wendy didn't like the look of him and said, "Oh great he'll have an axe and we're going to be hacked to death on our last day." As he got near he smiled and said, "Hello" and joked about my big lens....Hahahah! Not quite the axe murderer Wendy had imagined but maybe that was delirium setting in :). Back at the car we were now feeling very much worse for wear and having hardly had any food all day we were beginning to feel shaky and rough. The only thing remotely edible we had in the car was our left over bread which we'd brought to feed some ducks with :/. Wendy cracked the bag open, tore a bit off and started chewing.....bleurghhhh! I had some too but it was hard going and stuck to

the roof of our mouths in a dry and claggy lump. Swallowing it was harder still so we gave up and decided to save it for the ducks and wait until we found the next Services and left at 7.25pm.

At 7.52pm Wendy shrieked, "Blyth Services!" She'd seen the sign on the motorway and having realized that we'd never make it to the Pub in time for food I turned off the motorway. I suddenly realized that I'd turned off a junction early and we were now heading for god knows where....Ooops! I quickly programmed the Sat Nav to re-find the Services and fortunately we only had to drive an extra mile before we parked up....Phew! Blyth Services is a really good place to stop on the journey to or from Norfolk so is well worth the hassle and Wendy bailed out of the car and made a run for it. First off was the W.C's, second Costa and last but not least Burger King. She reappeared clutching her goodies and handed me the bag of food containing 6 x chicken nuggets, for me, and a portion of fries to share. She'd ordered medium fries thinking there'd be loads but there was hardly any.....Doh! After our 'hearty' tea (not) we left at 8.15pm with the longest section of our journey still to cover.

It felt like we'd never get there due to the ridiculous amount of road works on the M62 but we finally parked up on the Prom in Arnside at 10.30pm and we staggered over the road to our U.K local 'The Albion.' The difference in temperature was the first thing we noticed and by ek it's cold up north.....Brrrrrrr! We were probably in no fit state to be out in public but with bags of time to kill before our sailing we didn't have much else to do. We entered the Pub to find it absolutely heaving again so the new Landlord must still be doing a good job. This is brilliant news for him of course but BAD news for us at such a late stage in the game. We luckily found a free table and sat down with a drink anyway and stared into space like a pair of zombies. Strangely the landlord seemed to recognize us even though we are only there a few times a year..! The only thing we could think of to stay awake was to people watch and the dynamic in the pub never fails to keep us entertained. There was a table of student types up at the back and they all seemed to be getting on like a house on fire.....until 2 who were obviously a couple left. The others instantly started backstabbing and bitching about their mate's new boyfriend. "Why did she bring him with her, he's a *****!" "I can't stand him he's soooooo annoying he never shuts up!" "I don't know what she sees in him he's a *****!" We don't think anyone liked him very much :P. On another table was what appeared to be some kind of organized group holiday. Some of them had gone to the pub for tea and one woman who was obviously the leader was barking out orders about the plan for the next day. They'd all finished their meals when a few others turned up only to be told that they were too late and the rest of them were all heading back to their hotel. They all got up and left while the late arrivals went to the bar and ordered their drinks. We definitely think this may have been a cunning plan of theirs to escape an evening with military dragon woman :P. Let's face it, we'd do the same if we were in the same boat hahahaha. By 11.40pm the pub was more or less empty and yet again we were the hangers on so we thought it was our cue to leave.

The drive to Heysham felt like the longest ever and we just didn't seem to be making any progress but at 12.30am we were finally parking up and waiting to board. The wait while the containers are loading is one of the most tedious of all time so coupled with severe tiredness it was a killer. Wendy was beyond the help of caffeine and ended up asleep on the back seat of the car. While she was asleep and I was watching the containers loading up I heard an awful screech then a bang! One of the psycho lorry drivers had lost control and skidded into the side of the Linkspan.....unbelievable! Strangely he just reversed back and then carried on like nothing had happened.....mental. When we eventually started to board at 1.30am I had to wake Wendy up which wasn't easy I can tell you (she'd even slept right through the crash!) talk about sleeping like the dead! Once we were in the cabin she was instantly out like a light, which was a good job with the wind being so strong. I woke up a few times during the crossing and it felt very rough indeed but by the time we were both awake at 5.30am it was flat calm... weird.

We disembarked at 6.09am to find that it was a lovely day so we headed home to unpack and go through our millions of photos. After all that was done we loaded up the car and headed off out for the day :P.

We'd ended our trip with 4 x bird lifers each including the bogey Wryneck! We'd finally seen our first Adder and we'd got 3 insect lifers :). I'd driven 992 miles in total, which is quite low compared to our usual mileage. Even though it didn't feel like we'd seen that many species, especially with not being able to go down to the Fens, we'd ended up with 145! This was our 2nd highest total of any of our birding holidays but funnily enough our highest is 148 in Norfolk during May 2010!

Bird of the trip for me was a difficult choice but in the end I settled on Red-rumped Swallow. Seeing one was amazing enough but then seeing two coupled with the excitement of rushing back to get Wendy and her seeing it too was just great. Also the fact that the twitch was all friendly and relaxed made it an overall nice experience. As if that wasn't enough randomly I'd found 2 myself at Frampton Marsh the day after! Wendy couldn't decide which is pretty much bog standard for her :P. She couldn't believe she'd finally seen a Wryneck after failing on so many attempts, had always wanted to see a Red-rumped Swallow and hadn't even thought about ever seeing a Black-winged Stilt so was, and still is, torn between the 3 :).

Even though we'd gone in a prime week, which in previous years had recorded all sorts of Shrikes, Warblers and mega rarities, nothing really materialized. Norfolk had kept up the UK trend of Spring migration occurring later this year than ever (bar for a strange week in March when lots of stuff came in). This was proven after we'd been when in early June Norfolk was getting the Woodchat, Red-backed Shrikes, Icterine Warblers etc that we'd expected in May. This must've been how we finally caught up with our Bogey bird the Wryneck, which normally goes through in late April, but that's a small sacrifice :).

Although we didn't managed to find anything amazing again, we'd both taken some quality pictures and seen loads of new things so the trip definitely ranked as one of our best to date.

List

Mute Swan	Moorhen	Common Tern	Fieldfare
Greylag Goose	Coot	Arctic Tern	Song Thrush
Canada Goose	Common Crane	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Mistle Thrush
Brent Goose	Oystercatcher	Stock Dove	Cetti's Warbler
Egyptian Goose	Black-winged Stilt	Woodpigeon	Sedge Warbler
Shelduck	Avocet	Collared Dove	Reed Warbler
Wigeon	Little Ringed Plover	Turtle Dove	Blackcap
Gadwall	Ringed Plover	Cuckoo	Garden Warbler
Teal	Golden Plover	Barn Owl	Lesser Whitethroat
Mallard	Grey Plover	Tawny Owl	Whitethroat
Pintail	Lapwing	Swift	Chiffchaff
Shoveler	Knot	Wryneck	Willow Warbler
Pochard	Sanderling	Green Woodpecker	Goldcrest
Tufted Duck	Little Stint	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Bearded Tit
Eider	Temminck's Stint	Woodlark	Long-tailed Tit
Goldeneye	Curlew Sandpiper	Skylark	Blue Tit
Red-legged Partridge	Dunlin	Sand Martin	Great Tit
Grey Partridge	Ruff	Swallow	Coal Tit
Pheasant	Black-tailed Godwit	House Martin	Marsh Tit
Little Grebe	Bar-tailed Godwit	Red-rumped Swallow	Nuthatch
Great Crested Grebe	Whimbrel	Meadow Pipit	Treecreeper
Black-necked Grebe	Curlew	Water Pipit	Jay
Fulmar	Common Sandpiper	Yellow Wagtail	Magpie
Gannet	Greenshank	Channel Wagtail	Jackdaw
Cormorant	Redshank	Grey-headed Wagtail	Rook
Shag	Turnstone	Pied Wagtail	Carrion Crow
Bittern	Kittiwake	Wren	Starling

Little Egret	Black-headed Gull	Dunnock	House Sparrow
Grey Heron	Little Gull	Robin	Chaffinch
Spoonbill	Mediterranean Gull	Nightingale	Greenfinch
Marsh Harrier	Common Gull	Redstart	Goldfinch
Sparrowhawk	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Whinchat	Siskin
Buzzard	Herring Gull	Stonechat	Linnet
Kestrel	Great Black-backed Gull	Wheatear	Bullfinch
Hobby	Little Tern	Ring Ouzel	Yellowhammer
Water Rail	Sandwich Tern	Blackbird	Reed Bunting
			Corn Bunting
Adder	Frog	Hairy Dragonfly	Holly Blue
Grass Snake		Variable Damselfly	Speckled Wood
Common Lizard		Common Blue Damselfly	Small Copper
		Large Red Damselfly	