

Winter/Spring 2019

A Polar Adventure

“Well, there’s little point in going to bed if we are getting up again in a couple of hours time”

My wife, who was definitely feeling tired, disagreed and decided she would not be joining me on the deck of MV Ortelius in the early hours of the morning to look for walrus. To be fair, it was difficult to disagree with her as we had already had fabulous views of a “heap” of walrus, possibly 200 strong, a few days earlier. However, I was keen to take advantage of every opportunity that came our way and so removed my boots, waterproof jacket and fleece and settled down on top of the bed to get a couple of hours sleep.

My wife and I were travelling on a Naturetrek cruise on board MV Ortelius around the Svalbard archipelago and had soon settled in to our very comfortable en-suite cabin, with two single beds, a desk, a wardrobe and two windows. We had already enjoyed fabulous views of five blue whales in Isfjord, as we left Longyearbyen on our first afternoon and another great sighting followed the next day - a female polar bear with two cubs, hoovering up all the eggs they could find on Sigridholmen Island, much to the consternation of the eiders, barnacle geese, great skuas and glaucous gulls, which appeared to be nesting in this “protected” bird sanctuary.



Polar bears

Photo: Susanne Cohen



Reindeer

Photo: Susanne Cohen

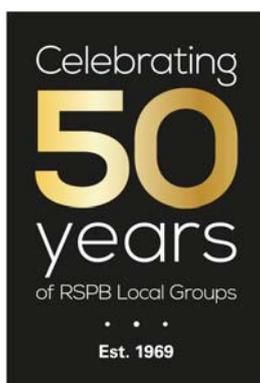
After an hour’s sleep, we were woken by an announcement over the ship’s PA system, advising us of a change of plan. Another ship had radioed in to say that they had found two polar bears on an iceberg with a recently killed seal and it was only two hours away. Our

captain immediately changed course and we both tried to contain our excitement, whilst trying to drop off to sleep once more.

Shortly before 1 am, another call came through to alert everyone that the polar bears were close and we both leapt up and got back into our outdoor clothes. Staggering out on to the deck in bright sunlight, we had difficulty in finding the bears, until the adult female came to the top of the iceberg and had a good look round.

As we got level, the captain killed the engines and we had a perfect view of what can only be described as a serious crime scene! The female and her cub, about 18 month’s old, had already devoured the majority of the seal carcass and were fighting over the bloody carcass, whilst glaucous and ivory gulls cleared up the smaller bits and pieces. The iceberg was covered in blood and one of the glaucous gulls attempted to eat a lengthy piece of the seal’s intestine, reminding us of the spaghetti scene in Disney’s “Lady and the Tramp”.

The cub behaved like an exuberant youngster, picking up one piece of bone, tossing it high in the air and looking most surprised when it



landed in the sea. He (or she) made a couple of half-hearted attempts to recover the bone, but was clearly reluctant to get his feet wet and returned to the middle of the iceberg to continue to harass the female, who was still picking over the carcass.

We must have watched the bears for well over an hour, in beautiful light, in the midst of the icebergs calving off from a nearby glacier. What could be better than this?

Well, visiting the cliffs at Alkefjellet came close! On this occasion, we boarded zodiacs (inflatable rubber dinghies seating twelve people including the driver) and cruised along the bottom of the cliffs, inhabited by 60,000 pairs of Brunnich's guillemots, packed tight on their nesting ledges, whilst many thousands of kittiwakes could be observed on the higher cliffs. A couple of Arctic foxes roamed the lower slopes feeding on fallen eggs and other carrion, whilst glaucous gulls and great skuas harassed the nesting seabirds.

Another day, another auk colony, but this one was rather different! On our last afternoon we landed at Ingeborgfjellet, where up to a quarter of a million little auks are reputed to nest. Here we watched enthralled as vast flocks flew round and round before coming in to land on the scree

covered slopes, where their mates were nesting. The noise of their wings created a real "whoosh" as they passed overhead and this experience was quite different to the views we have had of this species in the past – usually a lone storm driven winter bird on a local reservoir.



Little auk

The final "Bird List" for the trip was 27 species – the smallest we have ever recorded! But when that list includes breeding snow bunting, purple sandpiper and red phalarope (a better description than grey at this time of year!), pomerine skua, ivory and Sabine's gulls, king eider and rock ptarmigan the quality shines through.

Many thanks to Naturetrek and the crew and expedition team of MV Ortelius for a fantastic polar experience!

David Cohen
RSPB Lincoln Local Group

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Plastic pollution

You will all be aware of the problem of plastic pollution. David Attenborough highlighted it in his recent TV series, "The Blue Planet". Plastic waste is littering our countryside, polluting our oceans and killing wildlife. If you don't think it matters you should take a look at some of the horrific photographs of plastic pollution in the oceans on various online websites.

According to the Independent Newspaper we use seven million disposable plastic cups a day in the UK. That's 2.5 billion every year! They are discarded in waste bins, dropped in the streets, find their way into rivers and the oceans and are killing wildlife. This appalling waste will only stop when people stop buying them.,

It was heartening, therefore, to see some of the people who volunteered at last year's peregrine watch point bringing and using their own re-useable cups and taking them to the Cathedral Refectory for filling instead of coming away with a disposable plastic cup.

Did you know that even the humble teabag contains a thin layer of polypropylene plastic? These also find their way into rivers and oceans and add to the plastic pollution. The Worldwide Fund for Nature suggests buying loose-leaf tea and using a tea strainer, which is what everyone did just a few decades ago. Loose-leaf tea costs less, tastes better and the tea leaves make excellent garden compost.

Just a couple of simple things we can all do to reduce the appalling waste and dreadful plastic pollution blighting of our planet.

If you no longer wish to hear from RSPB Lincoln Local Group, please contact Roy Jillings, T: 01522 824861, confirming your name and address and stating that you wish to unsubscribe from the RSPB Lincoln Local Group's communications.

Holiday in Kent 20 - 23 May 2018

In May we were to spend four days in Kent, staying at the Abbots Barton Hotel in Canterbury. We set off from Lincoln at 7 am on Sunday 20 May 2018 and after a brief stop at the motorway services, we arrived at Stodmarsh Nature Reserve at midday. Stodmarsh has the largest reedbed in the South East of England where bitterns and marsh harriers breed. It is also home to the marsh frog. We did see a male and female marsh harrier and we had several sightings of a cuckoo. We heard Cetti's and garden warblers, chiffchaffs, blackcaps and common and lesser whitethroats. Cetti's warbler, common whitethroat, sedge warbler and reed warbler were also seen. Some of us saw a nightingale, red kite, green woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, buzzard, jay, treecreeper, kingfisher, turtle dove and ring-necked parakeet.

There were many swifts and sand martins flying around and a few common terns. We saw a stock dove, reed buntings, long-tailed tits, linnets, meadow pipits, goldfinches, house sparrows, blackbirds and blue tits. A few wildfowl were found, namely mute swans, greylag geese, mallards, shelducks, gadwalls and shovelers but a greenshank and lapwings were the only waders. Other water birds noted were moorhens, coots and great crested grebes. We spotted a kestrel but the most amazing spectacle was the sight of 13 hobbys in the sky at the same time. The usual corvids and woodpigeons were about as well as cormorants and lesser black-backed gulls, which brought the total species seen to 47. We then made the short journey to our hotel at Canterbury where we added grey wagtail and song thrush to our list.

On Monday we went to Pegwell Bay, which is a Kent Wildlife Trust reserve and consists of



Turtle dove

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extensive mudflats and dunes. Soon after leaving the coach we saw a little egret, mallards, shelducks, herring gulls, house sparrows, swallows, sand martins and swifts. We then followed the footpaths through the dunes and rough vegetation where we found magpies, carrion crows, woodpigeons, starlings, blackbirds, goldfinches, linnets, reed buntings, long-tailed tits, great tits and a kestrel. A cuckoo flew over and we had excellent views of a blackcap, chiffchaff, reed warblers, sedge warblers and common whitethroats. In a small wooded area we also spotted ring-necked parakeets, a song thrush and pheasant.

By now the tide had come in and we started to scan the mudflats. There were bar-tailed godwits, dunlins, knots and a grey plover in their stunning summer plumages as well as ringed plovers, turnstones, oystercatchers, curlews, a ruff and spoonbill. Meadow pipits were flitting about and in the distance there were cormorants, great black-backed gulls, black-headed gulls and three Sandwich terns but all too soon it was time to return to the coach and head back to our hotel.

On Tuesday we visited the fantastic RSPB Reserve at Dungeness, which is a wild area consisting of miles of shingle, freshwater pools,

reed beds and flower meadows. There were the usual wildfowl, corvids, cormorants and gulls as well as great crested grebes, coots and a heron. We saw the same waders as the previous day with the addition of redshanks, common sandpipers, lapwings and a spotted redshank in breeding plumage. Common terns, black terns, Canada geese, greylag geese and Egyptian geese were spotted and a marsh harrier, red kite, kestrel, peregrine falcon, hobby, cuckoo and great white egret were seen. Both common and lesser whitethroats were found as well as a Cetti's warbler, sedge warblers, swallows, reed buntings, dunnocks, chaffinches, linnets, house sparrows, great tits, robins, blackbirds and a stonechat. A great white egret was also seen and we had fantastic views of two bitterns.

On Wednesday we started our journey home but we left the motorway at Rochester to visit the RSPB reserves of Cliffe Pools and Northwood Hill. These two reserves are situated on the Hoo Peninsula and are approximately four miles apart. Our first stop was at Cliffe Pools, which consists of marshes and flooded clay pits. Here there were large numbers of avocets and Mediterranean gulls, which was a new bird for the holiday. We also heard a nightingale and a few lucky people managed to see it. We then moved on to Northwood Hill, which is a working farm with woodlands and grazing marshes. Again, the bird life was similar but we did find a solitary turtle dove that was very obliging by staying in the same area long enough for us all to see.

Over the four days we recorded 98 bird species but we also saw rabbits, sand lizards, marsh frogs and grey seals. Butterflies found included holly and common blues, peacocks, brimstones, red admirals, small coppers, brown argus and small heaths.

We had a wonderful time in Kent. We stayed in an excellent hotel, the weather was good and we visited some superb reserves. Our thanks go to Mike and Carol for once again arranging a lovely holiday.

Ray Daniels
RSPB Lincoln Local Group

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Sand lizard

Local groups' 50th anniversary

2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the first RSPB group and the 130th anniversary of the RSPB.

The first RSPB group, Epping Forest, was set up in early 1969 (closed in the 1990s and later replaced by the current NE London Local Group), closely followed by Bath and District, Coventry and Warwickshire and Newcastle upon Tyne, all in 1969. It would be another five years before the Lincoln Local Group was set up on 26 February 1974 with Win Chambers as Group Leader and Secretary and Noel Chambers as Treasurer. Eileen White was in charge of publicity and hall hiring and Mavis Blyton was in charge of programme planning. Since the formation of the group we have had three Group Leaders and 68 different committee members running the group, 30 female and 38 male with an age range from 20 to 82 representing a good cross section of the group's membership.



A special golden robin pin badge has been designed and will be in pin badge boxes across the country this year. These badges have a special backing card promoting local groups.

If you would like one of the special golden robin pin badges please contact Colin Goulding who will be able to obtain one for you.

Quotable quotes

"Volunteers don't get paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless"

Sherry Anderson

Conservation work

RSPB Investigations working to save the hen harrier

Hen harriers aren't a bird you see every day. In fact you're lucky if you've seen one at all, especially if you live in England. There were only nine successful nests in the whole of England in 2018, despite there being enough prey and habitat to support 300 pairs. Throughout the rest of the UK they aren't doing much better either. Estimates put the UK breeding population at just over 1,000 pairs and the population has declined by 24% since 2004, largely due to illegal persecution.

The RSPB Investigations team is dedicated to tackling raptor persecution head on, by preventing, detecting and investigating crimes against birds of prey – also known as raptors. It might not look it, but our beautiful countryside is a dangerous place for raptors. Every week, our team receives reports of birds like red kites, peregrine falcons and buzzards being deliberately shot, trapped or poisoned.

To maintain artificially high numbers of red grouse, some gamekeepers sadly resort to illegal predator control. This puts hen harriers – which nest and hunt on moorland – in the firing line.

Through the RSPB's EU-funded Hen Harrier LIFE project this summer our fieldworkers have been monitoring hen harrier nests and fitting chicks with satellite tags. These lightweight tracking devices help us see where the birds go once they fledge, and learn more about the threats they face. The tags are reliable, well tested pieces of kit, so when a bird's tag suddenly stops transmitting, it is highly suspicious – especially if this is over land managed for grouse shooting, as with Calluna,



Calluna - one of the satellite tagged chicks



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a female who disappeared last August over a grouse moor in the Cairngorms National Park.

Like all wild birds, raptors are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Anyone found to have intentionally harmed or disturbed a bird of prey faces an unlimited fine and/or 6 months in jail. However, in 2016, despite over 80 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution, no one was convicted for a raptor persecution offence. I'm sure you'll agree that this isn't justice.

Please help us raise awareness of this issue – tell your friends, join the movement on Twitter and remember to report anything suspicious to the police and the RSPB. This includes dead or injured birds of prey, illegal pole traps or suspicious behaviour. Thank you.

Find out about the work of the Investigations team at: www.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/b/investigations/default.aspx Or follow @RSPBbirders on Twitter

*Ed: Mark Avery, who campaigns tirelessly for better protection for hen harriers, has been nominated for **Birdwatch** magazine's Campaign of the Year award.*

Field Meeting Reports

Sculthorpe Manor & Foxley Wood - 10 June

In June it was one of Mike's mystery trips and he had arranged to visit two sites, which were new to the Group. One or two of us guessed correctly but most were in the dark until we reached Swineshead Bridge, when it became obvious that it was somewhere in Norfolk. The first reserve, Sculthorpe Manor near Fakenham, is managed by the Hawk and Owl Trust and there is a rich variety of wildlife in the woodland, fen and reedbed habitats. Access is open to everyone by means of boardwalks across the entire reserve.

Around the Centre and feeding stations we found pied wagtails, young robins, blue tits, great tits, greenfinches, a bullfinch and mallard. Flying over were carrion crows, woodpigeons, a common buzzard and a marsh harrier in the distance. Further into the reserve we saw a red kite, more bullfinches, chaffinches, blackbirds, a marsh tit, dunnock, nuthatch, treecreeper, jay and a male pheasant. A tawny owl was also spotted in a nest box.

There are five hides and an aerial walkway and the footpath follows the river for a short way. In this area there were swifts, reed buntings, moorhens, greylag geese, common terns, a reed warbler, a great spotted woodpecker and a cuckoo. This brought the total bird species seen to 30. We then travelled the short distance to our next reserve at Foxley Wood.

Foxley is Norfolk's largest remaining ancient woodland and Norfolk Wildlife Trust owns it. It is



Bittern

a hotspot for butterflies and wild flowers and all of the common woodland birds can be found. In the short time we were there we saw a blackcap, chiffchaff, garden warbler, nuthatch, goldfinches, blue tits, great tits and two buzzards. A few butterflies were seen,

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namely speckled woods, large coppers, orange tips and painted ladies. Also there were wave moths, a silver Y moth, emperor dragonflies and a broad-bodied chaser. It was a great day out and I am sure we will be visiting both reserves again.

Lakenheath Fen – 8 July

Our field trip in July was to RSPB Lakenheath Fen in Suffolk. It was a very hot day and we were confident we would see some good birds. First on our list were a kingfisher and Cetti's warbler seen from the viewing area at the Centre. Other birds found here were blue tits, a coal tit, goldfinches and reed buntings. We then set off to explore the first part of the reserve and we soon saw carrion crows, woodpigeons, black-headed gulls, a jay, reed buntings, lapwings and common whitethroats. When we arrived at the New Fen viewpoint we immediately noticed a bittern flying, a heron in the reeds and coots, moorhens, great-crested grebes, mallards, greylag geese, mute swans and a cormorant. From here we headed for the riverbank where we added pied wagtails, swifts, gadwalls and teals to our list. When we came to the Washland viewpoint there were avocets, black-tailed godwits, ruffs and oystercatchers.

After lunch we headed for the Joist Fen viewpoint but called in at the New Fen viewpoint on the way. Here we had superb views of three bitterns, which came out of the reeds into the open water. At the Joist Fen viewpoint another bittern was seen and in fact there were several sightings throughout the day. Other birds recorded were marsh harrier, kestrel, buzzard, little egret, green sandpiper, greenshank, blackcap, reed warbler and bearded tit. A total of 38 bird species were seen.

There were also a good variety of butterflies, which included small coppers, gatekeepers, red admirals, peacocks, commas, ringlets, small tortoiseshells, brimstones, painted ladies and burnet moths. It was an excellent day at a superb reserve.

Wicken Fen – 12 August 2018

Our trip in August was to Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire, which is a National Trust property and one of Britain's oldest nature reserves. There are many grazing animals such as konik ponies and highland cattle, which are integral to creating and maintaining habitat diversity.

In the morning we went to Sedge Fen and we saw wood pigeons, collared doves, carrion crows and magpies. A few swallows, house martins and starlings were flying around and there were house sparrows, yellowhammers, chaffinches, goldfinches and great tits in the hedges. We heard a green woodpecker and a great spotted woodpecker landed in a distant tree. There were mallards, moorhens, lesser black-backed gulls, black-headed gulls, a kestrel and common snipe and some of us saw a water vole, hedgehog and a couple of hares.



Brown hare

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After lunch we explored the Mere where we found, mute swans, Canada geese, greylag geese, a solitary snow goose, gadwalls, pochards, teals, coots, grey herons, little grebes and cormorants. A green sandpiper dropped in and a pheasant and jay were seen. Blue tits and long-tailed tits were flitting about in the hedges and pied wagtails and yellow wagtails were spotted in the fields. After a slow start we managed to record 38 species of birds and we had a lovely day.

Holme Dunes NWT – 9 September 2018

In September we visited the Norfolk Wildlife Trust at Holme near Hunstanton. There was a strong wind but it was dry with sunny periods. We started by visiting the hides overlooking Christie's and Hun Pools and on the way we spotted our first kestrel of the day as well as starlings and woodpigeons. From the various hides we saw a grey heron, little egret, common sandpiper, green sandpiper, greenshank, common snipe, little grebe, three pied wagtails, meadow pipits, moorhens, coots and a water rail. The wildfowl we found included greylag geese, tufted ducks, gadwalls, mallards, teals, shovelers, wigeons and mute swans. We had a glimpse of a great white egret flying by and good views of a male and female marsh harrier

quartering the reed beds. A common buzzard and hobby were also spotted.

After lunch we explored the beach and coastal path. On the beach it was difficult to keep our binoculars and telescopes steady in the strong wind but we managed to see bar-tailed godwits, oystercatchers, redshanks, ringed plovers, grey plovers, curlews, knots, turnstones and a small flock of sanderlings. Also there were Sandwich terns, common terns, cormorants, common gulls, great black-backed gulls, herring gulls, black-headed gulls and an Arctic skua. Some of us saw a merlin and stock dove and we found a solitary wheatear in the sand dunes. This brought the total for the day to 47 species.

*Ray Daniels
RSPB Lincoln Local Group*

Celebrating our volunteers

Last year, volunteers gave nearly one million hours of their time to the RSPB. This remarkable donation of time and talent demonstrates how fundamental volunteers are to saving nature. In fact, they make up 85% of our workforce: we genuinely couldn't do what we do without them.

What some might find surprising is the sheer diversity of volunteers. On a nature reserve for example, we may have people talking to visitors, others carrying out wildlife surveys and others involved in hands-on habitat management. And of course there is a whole host of people who work outside of our network of nature reserves. We have fundraisers, trainers, campaigners and many more, all making a real difference to the nature.

We recognise that people volunteer because they enjoy it and know they are making a difference, and so we try to ensure that we are



Eleanor Bentall (rspb-images.com)

Volunteer showing people peregrines



Mike Langman (rspb-images.com)

Arctic skua

able to provide opportunities that reflect an individual's availability, interests and talents. Pleasingly it seems to be working. Our most recent survey of volunteers found that 88% would recommend volunteering with the RSPB to family and friends. And we can't recommend our volunteers enough either!

*Sallie Crawley,
RSPB Volunteering Operations Team Manager*

Ed: The above is an extract from an article written by Sallie Crawley in the RSPB's latest annual report.

Volunteering opportunities in Lincoln

There are plenty of opportunities for people to volunteer locally with the RSPB Lincoln Local Group. We need people to help with the monthly walks at Hartsholme Country Park and Swanholme Lakes Nature Reserve. We need people to help at weekends at the heron watchpoint in the Park over three weekends in the spring. We need people to help at the peregrine watchpoint at Lincoln Cathedral at weekends in June and July. We also have some committee posts vacant for people who enjoy administrative tasks or organising events. Current vacancies include a Volunteers Coordinator and a Birdfood Organiser and from May 2019 there will be a vacancy for a Membership Secretary. To find out more about any of these roles please ask a committee member or the Group Leader or email your questions or expressions of interest to info@lincolnrspb.org.uk

We look forward to hearing from you.

Speyside, the Cairngorms and the Moray Coast 13 - 20 October 2018

Although this was the eighth visit to the Grant Arms in Grantown on Spey it felt somewhat different with a first foray into guiding Greenspaces clients whereas previously it had always been for hotel guests. A couple of day's reconnaissance ahead of guests arriving proved invaluable. The omens were not good with the funicular rail on Cairngorm being closed indefinitely due to structural issues so that piece of news already had an influence on the proceedings.

So, embarking on one of my favourite walks through Anagach Woods brought the usual suspects of coal tit, chaffinch and red squirrel at the hotel feeders. Down on the River Spey several goosanders, a couple of goldeneyes and half an hour spent watching a pair of dippers flitting from rock to rock. The winter thrushes were already in, with fieldfare and redwing in good numbers. A couple of bonus red kites over Cromdale proved to be quite a find.

Day two brought great views of an otter close to Kessock Bridge with several species of waders and gulls in attendance. Continuing along the Moray Coast to Findhorn Bay gave great views of golden plovers, bar-tailed godwits, curlews, etc. at their high tide roost, not helped by some 'numpty' out on the tide line trying to get some photos but only succeeding in scaring the birds further down the bay. The best was yet to come with over a thousand gannets diving into the sea just a few yards off the sea wall at the entrance to the bay, a real natural spectacle although it was interesting to note it was all adults and juveniles, possibly making their way down from Shetland.



Golden plover

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

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Further highlights of the day were 1,200 eiders both males and females in equal numbers forming a huge raft, the resident king eider drake was found in amongst them. Further gannets and a smattering of waders were seen. The day ended on an incredible high as the recently arrived whooper swans came in to roost at dusk at RSPB Loch Spynie eventually building up to close to 200 individuals.

The Saturday started with, centred on and closed with rain; still it was best to get it out of the way now. So to tour day one on Sunday with wall to wall sunshine, over on to the Black Isle via the Kessock Bridge where the otter put in an appearance, Munloch Bay, Avoch, Chanonry Point, RSPB Udale Bay and Jemimaville. Many highlights were, soaring buzzards, red kites and a sparrowhawk. Huge skeins of pink-footed geese, over 200 scaup close in on the Cromarty Firth and huge numbers of many varieties of wader at the high tide roost.

Monday just had to be a raptor day with high cloud, gentle breeze and Strathdearn beckoning. The day started well with several buzzards some being mobbed by the local ravens, a lazy loping red kite came over and it was then up into an adjacent valley to see our

first golden eagle of the day. Great to have views down onto it as it cruised the valley below us on those fingered wings. Further down Strathdearn another three goldies came into view. One, a juvenile, was particularly low; further red kites and buzzards were seen but the best was yet to come, whilst watching the red deer rutting on the hillside. Suddenly a rather large speck came into view, then another, then flying close together and eventually talon grappling we had our first white-tailed sea eagles of the trip - just incredible! On the way back yet more roe deer were seen on woodland fringes as dusk approached.

Another beautiful autumn day beckoned us from our slumber and after a hearty breakfast Loch Spynie was to be our first destination; wildfowl were in abundance with a few of the now resident whooper swans still on the loch. At the nearby feeders just outside the hide, highlights were treecreeper, great spotted woodpecker and greenfinch. But quite an amazing sight was in store as we walked back to the car with four species of thrush feeding on the berries in a rowan tree at the same time (blackbird, song thrush, fieldfare and redwing). Incredible numbers of farmland birds were seen here with sizeable flocks of yellowhammer, linnets and goldfinch.

Onwards to Lossiemouth where the highlight was a red-breasted merganser in the harbour with many guillemots now in winter plumage just beyond the sea wall. Then we noticed a flock of some 30 to 40 greenfinches feeding on the heads of *rosa rugosa* hips, a plant to note



Alastair Wilson (rspb-images.com)

Grey seals

for the wildlife garden. Onwards to Hopeman where the eiders were still in attendance but somewhat further out than on my previous visit. On the beach just below were several rock pipits, ringed plovers and a cracking bartailed godwit. A little further up the coast at Burghead our

first turnstone was seen along with many gannets and a smattering of grey seals.

Finishing off at Findhorn close up views of male and female stonechat were only surpassed by the sight of hundreds of gannets diving just offshore – gannet heaven! The odd red-throated diver and long-tailed duck flew by. High tide at Findhorn Bay brought many waders but a flock of about 40 pintails were the main attraction.

On the morning of the fourth day a walk with the information officer from RSPB Loch Garten was undertaken. This was incredibly informative with an insight into the current and future management of this part of Abernethy Forest and the connected areas. We had seen our first crested tits of the trip with the help of a little sample of sunflower hearts put out on the ground. Following on from this a drive up to Cairngorm base station gave us great views over the surrounding area. A mix of places on our homeward journey gave us views of 600+ greylag geese on a field.

Our fifth day would always prove to be a challenge with three activities being undertaken, but with some down time in between each and it was not compulsory to go on all of them. The morning started with a drive of 30 minutes to see a black grouse lekking site; it was great with the action taking place some 600 metres from a roadside pull-in, which kept disturbance to a minimum. Seven males were seen and although it wasn't the breeding season some good displays were observed. Then onwards to Lochindorb to get really good views of red grouse and our first kestrel of the tour. An afternoon walk down to the River Spey brought dipper, 11 goosanders and 70 siskins being harassed by a sparrowhawk. An evening stint at a local specialist wildlife hide gave wonderful views of two very individual pine martens and a rather bemused roe deer at close quarters. Red deer were also heard rutting very close by.



Ben Hall (rspb-images.com)

Red deer

For the final day of the Greenspaces tour, the private loch at Avielochan was visited where a couple of whoopers had recently dropped in. The real find were a couple of bramblings mixed in with chaffinches and also our first wren and dunnock of the trip. We had a hot coffee at the café/art gallery prior to a visit to the Cairngorm Reindeer Centre to learn all about these unique creatures, which were introduced as a free ranging, roaming flock in this area in 1952. Driving to Loch Insh via Glen Feshie gave views of several species but sadly not the hen harrier we were hoping for. So a final evening dinner with a fun quiz followed with challenging questions such as – how many times did the kettle get boiled during the week to fill the flask?

So it was time to say goodbye to tour participants on the Saturday morning and then take some holiday guests to Strathdearn in what was rather dull but windy conditions. Not to be outdone a couple of peregrines were loving these conditions, a goldie being mobbed by a raven, the feral goats and top of the pile were the sightings of salmon spawning in the river.

The Sunday was departure day, calling into RSPB Loch Leven in Perth and Kinross, massive numbers of waterfowl with the resident peregrine having a real taste for teal that seemed to be having a real hard time of it. Onwards to Musselburgh to catch the high tide, wonderful light and the amazing birds, five Slavonian grebes in the scope together, common, velvet and surf scoters just off shore, thousands of waders on the lagoons in superb light all as part of a bracing walk in the company of some local birders.

The following half-day prior to coming home was spent at the Scottish ornithologists HQ, Aberlady Bay and the Scottish Seabird Centre at North Berwick. It was with a heavy heart that I crossed back into England to come home. Scotland never ceases to amaze me with this

Mike Langman (rspb-images.com)



Slavonian grebe

Golden eagle



Mike Langman (rspb-images.com)

occasion being one of the best. Incredible scenery, a welcoming hotel, good food, great company, settled weather and amazing wildlife makes for a great combination.

The final tally for the tour was 88 species of birds with some notable omissions with 105 being seen throughout the entire trip. Next year's dates are already in the diary and it will certainly have something to live up to if this one is used as a yardstick.

Steve Lovell
RSPB Lincoln Local Group

Good food now at Sherwood

The new visitor centre is now open at the RSPB's newest reserve at Sherwood Forest. The new café at Sherwood is part of the 'Food For Life Served Here' scheme run by the Soil Association and celebrates sustainable, locally sourced GM- and additive-free food, which meets animal welfare standards and makes healthy living easy.

In fact all eleven of the RSPB cafés that were eligible for the 'Food For Life Served Here' scheme have successfully achieved these awards so when you visit one of our nature reserve cafés you can now be sure that healthy choices are even easier to make, and that what you're eating and drinking is not only good for the planet but also for animal welfare.

As a conservation charity we're keen to lead by example when it comes to serving food that makes a difference. This means reducing the impact of our nature reserve catering on the environment and seeking to support local businesses and nature friendly farms. For example, at our Minsmere reserve in Suffolk, the fresh milk we use comes from a dairy just 12 miles away. While in South Wales, the organic eggs, bacon and sausages served at the Newport Wetlands café are supplied by local family farms.

Long service awards

Two committee members were presented with five-year long service awards at the September meeting. Mike Catchpole and Graham Mumby-Croft have been volunteering for the RSPB Lincoln Local Group for just over five years and were presented with a silver swift pin badge and certificate in appreciation of the work they have done for the RSPB.

Mike is the Group's publicity organiser and Graham is the Group's treasurer.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who helped to deliver the Group's 2019 programme to members in the Lincoln area. It has saved the RSPB a small fortune in postage costs and it is greatly appreciated.

Dates for your diary

January

12 - 14 THREE DAYS in Northumberland visiting Druridge Bay Country Park, Chevington Marsh, NWT Hauxley and WWT Washington, £165 in a double or twin room or £205 in a single room. Cost includes all coach travel, entry to WWT and two nights half board at the White Swan Hotel, Alnwick. Cancellation insurance is *not* included.

26 - 28 BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH The RSPB's nationwide event. See the winter issue of *Nature's Home* magazine or contact RSPB HQ T: 01767 680551.

February

14 INDOOR MEETING Varanger & Northern Finland in Summer by **Graham Catley**, one of Lincolnshire's best known birders and bird photographers. Sponsored by a Group member who wishes to remain anonymous.

17 COACH TRIP to Brandon Marsh. Headquarters of the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust set in 220 acres, the Reserve is a SSSI. Leave Lincoln 8 am. Leave reserve 4 pm. Adults £23 including admission charge. C, H, NT, S, VC, WC.

March

14 INDOOR MEETING Action in Nature by **Mike Wilkes, FRPS**. A welcome return of this popular nature photographer and lecturer. Sponsored by London Camera Exchange, Lincoln.

17 COACH TRIP to Yorkshire Water Tophill Low. Two reservoirs dominate the reserve and have SSSI status for their massive wildfowl

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numbers. 160+ bird species, with over 60 readily visible even in mid winter. Leave Lincoln 8 am. Leave reserve 5 pm. Adults £22 including admission charge. H, NT, WC.

April

11 INDOOR MEETING Birds Without Borders; the Challenge of Migration by Peter Holden. Sponsored by Michael Carter Travel.

Indoor meetings are held at Bishop Grosseteste University. Nature reserve facilities are shown thus: C = Café, H = Hides, NT = Nature Trail, S = Shop, VC = Visitor Centre, WC = Toilets. One child free for each full fare-paying adult booked on the Sunday coach trips (any admission charges still apply). To book coach trips or holidays phone Mike on 01526 321917.

Further details of all of our events can be found on our website: <http://www.lincolnrspb.org.uk>

Find us on 

<http://www.facebook.com/lincolnlocalgroup>

The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We also play a leading role in a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations.

Website: <http://www.rspb.org.uk>

The RSPB Lincoln Local Group holds regular events to which RSPB members and members of the public are welcome.

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