

Autumn birding on the Yorkshire Coast

The Yorkshire coast offers a diverse range of birding options during the autumn migration and this short tour offers the chance to enjoy some exciting birding at the peak of the autumn migration. Yorkshire is home to three bird observatories situated at Spurn, Flamborough and Filey and during our tour we will visit all three. With suitable weather conditions spectacular falls of passerine migrants can take place with scarce and unusual species often among the more regular species. The observation of visible migration can be a challenge but is often spectacular. The east coast's premier sea-watching location is Flamborough Head and we will hope to enjoy some interesting seabird passage during our trip. With a good range of wetland species plus some beautiful scenery, there is much to enjoy during this single centre holiday based in the village of Hunmanby.



Short-eared Owl Photo: Chris Bradshaw

Dates

Thursday 5th - Sunday 8th
October 2017
Leader: Chris Bradshaw
Group size: 2 - 6
Species: 105-130

Day 1: Although our tour will visit all of the three observatories along the Yorkshire coast, we begin with an exploration of a number of sites in the Scarborough area. North of the town we visit Long Nab, an under-watched location which has great potential that is slowly being unearthed by a keen group of local birders. The scrub and hedgerows attract migrant passerines and we should see Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Goldcrest at this time of year, plus Redwing and more interesting possibilities perhaps including Firecrest or Ring Ouzel. The stubble fields here have regularly attracted small numbers of Lapland Buntings in recent autumns with Snow Bunting also possible. Offshore we may see interesting seabirds such as Arctic Skua, Great Skua or Little Gull. Nearby Scalby Mills attracts good numbers of gulls, divers and auks, has a regular flock of Wigeon and the adjacent scrub at Scalby Nab hosted a Siberian Stonechat in 2013. The town of Scarborough is dominated by the castle headland, which is covered in scrub and trees attractive to migrants and also attracts occasional rarities. The head-

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Northern Wheatear Photo: Chris Bradshaw

land is a regular spot for Peregrine and migrants might include Black Redstart, Firecrest or Ring Ouzel whilst our 2014 group saw Yellow-browed Warbler here. The nearby harbour has a regular high tide roost of Purple Sandpipers and sometimes attracts storm-driven divers or auks, whilst there is also a regular location for Mediterranean Gull just to the south of town.

If the coast is quiet for migrants, we can head inland to visit the nearby Carrs where, depending on recent weather conditions, a number of farms will have flooded areas attractive to recently arrived wintering wildfowl. Small copses host the commoner woodland species plus Marsh Tit and the increasingly rare Willow Tit. In addition, Wykeham South Lake attracts a variety of commoner wildfowl and sometimes hosts more unusual species such as Slavonian Grebe, Scaup or Long-tailed Duck.

Day 2: Our destination today is the fragile coastal peninsula at Spurn. Here the Yorkshire coast narrows to a point at the mouth of the Humber estuary and creates a funnel that concentrates migrants as they head south or make landfall. The narrow peninsula has extensive areas of Sea

Buckthorn and other bushes that are attractive to tired migrants. Commoner migrants are likely to include Northern Wheatear, Chiffchaff, Lesser Whitethroat, Goldcrest and Redwing. Scarcer species might include Firecrest or Brambling and, with luck, we might find rarer migrants such as Yellow-browed and Barred Warbler or Red-breasted Flycatcher. Visible migration of swallows, pipits, wagtails and finches is a feature of the area and impressive numbers of these birds can be seen streaming south down the peninsula. The more regular raptors in the area include Marsh and Hen Harrier or Merlin. The position of Spurn at the mouth of the Humber Estuary means that we will find significant numbers of waders with Golden Plover, Redshank, Dunlin, Grey Plover and Knot certain to be present, and Greenshank, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint among the less common possibilities. Rare birds often show up at Spurn and in the past few years American Golden Plover, Red-throated Pipit and Radde's Warbler have appeared during the period of our scheduled tour.

We will spend most of the day at Spurn but on our return journey to Hunmanby we will spend some time at Hornsea Mere where large numbers of Little Gulls often congre-

gate. Other species should include good numbers of diving duck and perhaps one of the rarer grebes.

Day 3: Today we visit Flamborough Head, an impressive chalk headland that juts out into the North Sea and provides some of the best seawatching along the whole of the east coast of the UK. During favourable weather conditions we are likely to see a range of seabirds that should include Gannets and Kittiwakes along with a good chance of Manx and Sooty Shearwaters, Arctic and Great Skuas, various gulls, terns and larger auks. With luck, we may encounter one or two of the more unusual species such as Pomarine or Long-tailed Skua, Sabine's Gull or Grey Phalarope. We may see sizeable flocks of migrating Pink-footed Geese which are frequently recorded along the Yorkshire coast in autumn as birds head to their Norfolk wintering grounds. The hedgerows and copses on the headland attract a good selection of migrant passerines with the likely commoner species being much the same as those listed for Scarborough area and Spurn. Scarcer migrants might include Yellow-browed or Pallas's Warbler, Richard's Pipit or Great Grey Shrike. Our 2014 group enjoyed wonderful views of a Red-breasted Flycatcher here. Flamborough has an enviable reputation for receiving arrivals of some nationally rare species with Rustic Bunting, Radde's and Dusky Warblers seen in the scheduled period of our visit during the past few years.

If things are quiet on the coast, we can head inland to Tophill Low, a water treatment facility operated by Yorkshire Water which is an excellent birding site. A mosaic of deep storage reservoirs, shallow reed-fringed pools, scrub and woodland mean that there is usually something to see. A selection of migrant waders is usually present with Black-tailed Godwit, Green and Common Sandpiper the most likely and scarcer species such as Little Stint, Curlew or Pectoral Sandpiper possible. Flocks of Teal may attract a lingering Garganey, whilst deeper water attracts diving duck including Goldeneye and sometimes Scaup. Scrub and wooded areas host a variety of commoner woodland species, whilst the reedy fringes may harbour Water Rail.

Day 4: We spend the final morning with a

visit to Filey where we will visit the Brigg, a narrow peninsula jutting out into the sea and a site favoured by waders, wildfowl, gulls and perhaps some lingering terns. Waders include commoner species such as Turnstone, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Redshank and perhaps Knot and Purple Sandpiper, whilst sea duck such as Eider and Common Scoter are regularly present along with small numbers of Red-throated Divers and Great Crested Grebes. We will search the trees and bushes of the North Cliff Country Park for any migrants with species such as Wheatear, Chiffchaff and Goldcrest among the most likely prospects. In suitable weather conditions, scarcer migrants such as Wryneck or Barred Warbler may turn up here. Nearby, the small Filey Dams reserve often attracts a few freshwater waders with Black-tailed Godwit or Green Sandpiper among the more likely possibilities and flocks of commoner ducks species are usually also present.

Prices

Tour Price: £595
Single room: £45
Deposit: £100

Included: Guidance, accommodation and meals, transport to and from the birding areas from Hunmanby.

Not included: Travel to Hunmanby, accommodation and meals on the night of October 4th, drinks, tips, insurance and items of a personal nature.

Clients should be ready to begin birding on the morning of 5th October, so should arrive in Hunmanby on the evening of Wednesday 4th October. There are good rail services to Scarborough and Filey and pick-ups from Seamer, Scarborough and Filey rail stations can be arranged. Participants should be aware that this migrant-focused itinerary may change in response to arrivals of migrants and to maximize the chances of seeing any scarce and rarer species that may appear during the course of the tour.

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