

THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

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LANCASHIRE Long Weekend in Spring 20 April - 23 April 2018

TOUR REPORT

Leader: Barrie Cooper

This was the first Travelling Naturalist Lancashire break. Due to inclement weather in the UK and southern Europe, the spring migration of birds had been delayed. Most species were between one and two weeks late compared to typical arrival dates in the UK. As such, some species that could have been seen were neither seen nor heard. Nevertheless we had some fine views of some impressive birds. Britain's most persecuted bird – the hen harrier - was one highlight that we watched while a male ring ouzel was singing and showing well. We had excellent views of a pair of ospreys, mating peregrines, displaying marsh harriers, displaying red grouse, 2,500 black-tailed godwits in breeding plumage, close views of an adder and several brown hares were some of the highlights. Some excellent food at our hotel added to the overall quality of this short break in one of the most biodiverse parts of the UK.

Day 1: Friday 20 April 2018

Sunny, 16 degrees

We had time to do a couple of hours exploration along the Lune Estuary and adjacent fields. Conder Pool had a few oystercatcher, little egret and tufted duck. The tide was falling on the Lune Estuary and a couple of eider were visible, plus redshank, lesser black-backed and herring gull. However, the main prize here were a couple of whimbrel that must have recently arrived. Driving towards Cockersands a few whooper swans were among the herd of mute swans; the whoopers would probably be leaving for Iceland within the next week or two. On reaching the edge of Morecambe Bay, a dog walker was disturbing the waders, with a flock of dunlin failing to settle for more than a few seconds. This was frustrating because there could have been other wader species around but the birds would not settle. The energy wasted by the waders due to disturbances like this can be the difference between success and failure on the breeding grounds or, in the worst case, death through exhaustion. On the coastal fields a few golden plover were in breeding plumage and at least ten brown hares provided some mammal interest. A flock of linnet flew over before we headed back to the hotel for dinner.

Day 2: Saturday 21 April 2018

Sunshine all day, 22 degrees

The highlight of the pre-breakfast excursion was two black-tailed godwits and a few eider on the Lune Estuary. On the way to Bowland, a brief stop at Abbeystead enabled us to get good views of a calling nuthatch, but no dipper. A toilet stop in Slaidburn was convenient for sightings of swallow, house martin and rooks. The hike in Bowland was very productive and enjoyable in the warm sunshine. Several displaying red grouse seemed to find the weather to their liking and we had some close males posing in the heather with their red wattles erect to impress. The warm air was good for raptors and a few common buzzard took full advantage by soaring over the moors and ridges. The presence of the buzzards provoked mobbing behaviour from hen harrier and peregrine. It was marvellous to see the harrier and peregrine in particular, with the latter also showing its legendary speed. Hen harriers and peregrines are persecuted birds so it was wonderful to see them. It's estimated that there is breeding habitat to support at least 300 hen harrier nests in England, yet there were only three successful nests in 2017 with none at all in Bowland. The highlight of a brief visit to Stocks reservoir was a splendid pair of red-breasted mergansers. Other birds here included lesser black-backed gulls, great crested grebe and willow warbler. On the return journey we called into Abbeystead in the hope of seeing dipper and we weren't disappointed. A very obliging dipper showed very well by perching on rocks, swimming in the river and catching its invertebrate food. It was a perfect way to end a good day.

Day 3: Sunday 22 April

Rain and cloud in the morning, brighter with sun in late afternoon, 12 degrees max.

In contrast to yesterday, it was rain that greeted us this morning so a quick change of plan was necessary. We made our way straight to Leighton Moss. A good variety of waterbirds were seen from the hides including common pochard, tufted duck, little grebe, shoveler, teal, little egret and common snipe. A dedicated male great-crested grebe repeatedly brought vegetation to maintain the nest that his partner was sitting on. A water rail was heard doing its squealing pig calls from the reedbed, while sedge, reed and Cetti's warblers were also heard but not seen. A large flock of swallows appeared over one of the lakes, flying low over the water to feed on the abundant insects and a few swifts and sand martins accompanied them. Pride of place at Leighton must go to the marsh harriers with most of the reserve's three males and four females showing well and giving close views. The harriers occasionally perched up to give scope views and the some of the females collected vegetation for nest building. On the way back to the visitor centre a pair of bullfinches showed well. It was all entertaining stuff and it was difficult to drag ourselves away, but eventually we did.

Our final destination was a private nature reserve. We were privileged to have close views of a pair of ospreys as soon as we arrived. The male was carrying a fish and then the female appeared. The pair eventually settled on the nest giving fine views through the scope. A herd of red deer were grazing in a field behind the osprey nest and a tree pipit was displaying in front of the nest. After this excellent

introduction to the reserve we went for a walk. Some feeders had siskin and coal tit with several goldfinches. A male pied flycatcher was doing a lot of singing and gave us intermittent views. An adder was sunning itself close to the path before gently moving away. A garden warbler showed amazingly well, singing out in the open at the top of a tree next to the path. A female roe deer also gave close views as she contentedly grazed near the path just 25 metres away from us. When we returned to the osprey viewpoint the red deer had moved into a more open area and sixty-five individuals were counted. Three common buzzards appeared before, unfortunately, we had to leave this magic place, bathed in sunshine in the beautiful Cumbrian countryside. It had been a brief but truly memorable visit to a site created by a visionary with a passion for wildlife conservation.

Day 4: Monday 23 April

Sunny intervals but windy, 12 degrees max

Priority for this final, half-day session was to visit the two places we cancelled because of yesterday's rain. An old limestone quarry was our first destination and it didn't take long to locate our target bird. A splendid male peregrine was sitting on a ledge but, before everyone could look through the scope, it flew a short distance to his mate and the amorous couple enjoyed some morning nuptials. This pair failed to breed successfully last year so it's to be hoped that they can propagate their persecuted species this year. The male returned to his original ledge for a few minutes to give everyone the chance to enjoy scope views. After a few minutes he was off to do some hunting for his mate's breakfast.

Our next port of call was the Eric Morecambe hide to see some waterbirds. Before we reached the hide, we had good views of a sedge warbler, but a vocal lesser whitethroat behaved in typical manner and only allowed brief views. Nearby a Cetti's warbler gave the usual loud vocalisation but a flight view as it flew to another series of bushes was the only glimpse it gave. Approximately 50 avocets were in front of the hide and the latest census was 14 nests. One of the highlights here were the 2,500 black-tailed godwits, most of which were in breeding plumage; they were a stunning sight, particularly when they flew. A few bar-tailed godwits were also mixed in, along with about five hundred red knot. Unusually, there were still approximately 40 pink-footed geese that were extending their stay in Lancashire. Wigeon, pintail and shoveler were around in small numbers as well as the usual oystercatchers and common redshank. Before departing this part of Morecambe Bay, we were fortunate to see 35 white wagtails that had settled in a field to feed up before continuing their migration to Iceland. It was now to time to drive the short distance to the main part of the Leighton Moss reserve for a brief visit.

A nuthatch was calling close to where we parked the bus and further investigation revealed it to be posing at the top of a low tree just a few yards away. It was amazingly close views of this beautiful male nuthatch; why do birds pose like this when you haven't got your camera? Our walk to and from the Causeway Hide included sedge warbler, bullfinch and song thrush. Most of the same species as yesterday were visible with the addition of a pair of pintail. A couple of male marsh harriers flew over the reedbeds. Our final 30 minutes were in Lilian's Hide where we sat and ate lunch before it was time to depart, with most of the group transferring to Lancaster rail station. It was the end of a short but enjoyable few days in this beautiful part of England. We saw some very good wildlife, ate lots of tasty food, enjoyed each other's company and had a great time.

Common Name	Latin Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
BIRDS	AVES				
Ducks, Geese and Swans	Family Anatidae				
Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	X	X	X	X
Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	X	X	X	X
Pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>				X
Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	X	X	X	X
Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	X			
Common shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	X	X	X	X
Northern shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			X	X
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			X	X
Eurasian wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>				X
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	X	X	X	X
Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				X
Eurasian teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		X	X	X
Common pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			X	X
Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	X	X	X	X
Common eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	X	X		
Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		X		
Pheasants and allies	Family Phasianidae				
Red grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus scotica</i>		X		
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	X	X		
Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	X	X	X	X
Grebes	Family Podicipedidae				
Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			X	X
Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		X	X	X
Hérons, Bitterns	Family Ardeidae				
Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	X	X	X	X
Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	X	X	X	X
Cormorants, Shags	Family Phalacrocoracidae				
Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	X	X	X	X
Ospreys	Family Pandionidae				
Western osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			X	
Kites, Hawks and Eagles	Family Accipitridae				
Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			X	X
Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		X		
Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		X	X	X
Rails, Crakes and Coots	Family Rallidae				
Water rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			H	
Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	X		X	X

Common Name	Latin Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	X		X	X
Oystercatchers	Family Haematopodidae				
Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	X	X	X	X
Stilts, Avocets	Family Recurvirostridae				
Pied avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				X
Plovers	Family Charadriidae				
Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	X	X	X	X
European golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	X			
Sandpipers, Snipes	Family Scolopacidae				
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	X			
Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	X	X	X	X
Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				X
Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		X		X
Red knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>				X
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	X			
Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			X	
Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	X	X	X	X
Gulls, Terns and Skimmers	Family Laridae				
Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	X	X	X	X
European herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	X	X		
Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	X	X	X	X
Pigeons, Doves	Family Columbidae				
Common wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	X	X	X	X
Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	X	X	X	X
Swifts	Family Apodidae				
Common swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			X	
Woodpeckers	Family Picidae				
Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		X	X	
European green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			H	
Caracaras, Falcons	Family Falconidae				
Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	X	X	X	X
Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		X		X
Crows, Jays	Family Corvidae				
Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	X	X	X	X
Western jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	X	X	X	X
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		X		
Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	X	X	X	X
Northern raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		H		
Tits, Chickadees	Family Paridae				

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Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		X	X	X
Eurasian blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	X	X	X	X
Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>		X	X	X
Larks	Family Alaudidae				
Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	X	X		
Swallows, Martins	Family Hirundinidae				
Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			X	X
Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		X	X	X
Common house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		X		
Cettia Bush Warblers and allies	Family Cettiidae				
Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H	X
Leaf Warblers and allies	Family Phylloscopidae				
Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		X	X	X
Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	X			
Reed Warblers and allies	Family Acrocephalidae				
Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			H	X
Eurasian reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			H	
Sylviid babblers	Family Sylviidae				
Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	X	X	X	X
Garden warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			X	
Lesser whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>				X
Wrens	Family Troglodytidae				
Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	X	X	X	X
Nuthatches	Family Sittidae				
Eurasian nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		X	X	X
Starlings, Rhabdornis	Family Sturnidae				
Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	X	X	X	X
Thrushes	Family Turdidae				
Ring ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>		X		
Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	X	X	X	X
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		X	X	X
Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		H		
Chats, Old World Flycatchers	Family Muscicapidae				
European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	X	X	X	X
European pied flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			X	
Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		X		
Dippers	Family Cinclidae				
White-throated dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		X		

Common Name	Latin Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches	Family Passeridae				
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X	X	X	X
Accentors	Family Prunellidae				
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	X		X	X
Wagtails, Pipits	Family Motacillidae				
Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		X		
White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				X
Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	X	X	X	X
Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		X		
Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			X	
Finches	Family Fringillidae				
Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	X	X	X	X
Eurasian bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			X	X
European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		H	X	X
Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	X			
European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	X	X	X	X
Eurasian siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			X	
Buntings, New World Sparrows and allies	Family Emberizidae				
Common reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		X	X	X
MAMMALS					
Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			X	
Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>			X	
Grey squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		X		
Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	X	X	X	
European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		X		
REPTILES					
Adder (common viper)	<i>Vipera berus</i>			X	
BUTTERFLIES					
Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>		X		
Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>		X		