

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

FARNE ISLANDS

9-16 JULY 2016

Guide: Julian Sykes

Guests: Barbara & Richard Shaw, Gillian & David Smith, Kathryn Sharman, Ray Burgess, Stephen Foster

Day 1 Julian meets up with Kathy and then Steve at Newcastle train station having already sorted out the minibus for the week. So minutes later we are heading out of the city and north along the infamous A1. Thankfully it is quiet today and we make good time arriving at our accommodation for the week about 90 minutes later. We check-in just as Mike and Barbara arrive from their week in Speyside with another SW guide, Roy, concentrating on butterflies, dragonflies and fauna, which has been terrific. Ray, David and Gill are already here so we have our full compliment.

Julian goes around everyone's respective rooms and organises a short walk ahead of the evening meal at 18:30. This is pretty productive as we take the minor road out of the village to the coast and see the mighty North Sea for the first time. It's a good start to the list as we find a couple of lovely male Yellowhammers, lots of young House Martins sat on a window ledge and our first mammal, Rabbit, before reaching the entrance to a farm. Here we stop for a wee while, with Julian pointing out our first Tree Sparrows, a Cormorant drying its wings in the bay, a young Stonechat and several Pied Wagtails. David finds another Stonechat along with Linnet and Mike spots an Oystercatcher near the local golf course – a pretty good start.

We now need to be back at the hotel and walk purposefully back seeing a couple of Goldfinches and Common Swifts hawking insects over this very quaint village. We get back and head off for a quick freshen up before reconvening in the hotel's restaurant. The evening meal is excellent and we are looked after by our lovely hostess Danielle ahead of retiring into the lounge with hot drinks. Here Julian goes through the checklist followed by the plan for the week ahead, which sounds excellent – fingers crossed for some decent weather. We are all tired after a long day travelling and a little after 9pm we wander off to bed.

Day 2

It is a bit of a grey morning as we meet for an excellent buffet breakfast at 8am, being ready to leave an hour later. This is our 'southern day' as we set off for Teeside but first we need to make a wee detour to hook up with one of Julian's good friends. Gill had unfortunately left her binoculars back home (we all know this feeling!) and she is very kindly lending her a pair for the week – great news. We continue south through the Tyne Tunnel after being ripped off (20p) by the automatic cash machine. Soon enough we are nearing the area's main coastal town Hartlepool and beyond here the industrial area of Teeside, with a Sparrowhawk chasing another wee bird. Thankfully Ray and David know the sites well having been here last year and a few days ago respectfully, so find the Seal Sands NR car park easily.

We ready ourselves and walk up the track towards the river seeing our first of many Avocets seen today - it's fabulous to see this beautiful wader doing so well here. A little further David spots a Great Spotted Woodpecker flying over, before getting to the view point. Here we see our first Common Seals hauled out on the mud banks along with an odd couple of Grey Seals, despite being the more common species in the UK! There are some good birds with a couple of Whimbrel amongst the Curlews plus Common Redshank, Oystercatcher and a single Common Sandpiper. A good start, we continue back to the main road, cross over and then walk to another open hide where we find Common Terns breeding, Little Egret (another good coloniser now) but not the hoped-for Little Ringed Plover. Next we follow this tidal river east with the level falling and exposing lots of mud and seeing more of the same waders. Then Mike spots a 'Ringed Plover-type' on some rough ground adjacent to another small freshwater pool, it is a Little Ringed Plover – superb. There is actually a pair and there are also tiny chicks running around looking incredibly fragile like tiny fluff-balls next to their parents. On the edge of the pool we find 30+ summer-plumage Dunlin, which look fabulous, and watch them intently feeding on the water's edge. There is a Rock Pipit just below where we are standing but the majority are Meadow Pipits, it's good to see the comparison though. Then Steve announces he has found a couple of Ringed Plovers, giving another chance of comparing characteristics with their 'Little' cousins. It is a great start to the day but it's time now to head for lunch at another site just a few miles away.

We reach Saltholme RSPB Reserve as the sun is trying to peek through and Ray advises Julian on which hide to use for the picnic lunch – thankfully we can take it over as it's empty. Forgetting our lunch for a few minutes we check the reed-fringed pool quickly seeing a few gorgeous summer-plumage Black-tailed Godwits plus Grey Heron, Little Egret, Gadwall, Teal and Greylag Geese. We enjoy our sandwiches continuing to scan the pool in front of us and get brief flight views of Reed Warbler, Lesser-Black-backed Gull, Kestrel, Moorhen and Coot. After our lunch we then head to the huge

Saltholme Reserve visitor centre to use the facilities and with limited time we quickly check the bird feeders getting lovely looks at Tree Sparrow and Goldfinch. The large picture windows overlook a large lagoon where we see a variety of wildfowl including Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Great Crested and Little Grebes. There has been a Spoonbill seen and we set off to the hide it was last seen from. A pair of Reed Bunting show well along the track and there is Common Terns and Black-headed Gulls everywhere. At the 'Saltholme hide' we search the large shallow pool with Barbara finding a couple of male Wigeon. David points out a close Common Sandpiper and there are several Avocets right in front of us before a Greenshank flies in – great stuff. The Spoonbill is not found before its time to leave but it has been a very good start to our week in N/E England here in Teeside. However with one more site to visit we need to leave!

Julian has been given some information on a rare North American larid (Bonaparte's Gull) that's been seen at the mouth of the River Wansbeck and we are keen to try and see it. This estuary is just north of Newcastle and we need to head back north to reach it. About 45 minutes to an hour later we are slowly driving through a caravan park and parking adjacent to the river mouth with the road bridge about 200m inland. The tide is now out exposing lots of mud and the birds are fairly spread out but we walk slowly west along the edge checking all the Black-headed Gulls. Initially we find another couple of new birds with good looks at both Sandwich and Arctic Terns, plus another Greenshank and Whimbrel. The gull is not showing but Gill and Mike have walked on and think they have found something different just below the bridge so we quickly move to their position. Julian confirms it is the Bonaparte's Gull we have been searching for – brilliant as its showing so well. We stay for a while watching this diminutive gull feed on the edge of the river, seeing all its salient points of identification – this is a new bird for most of us! Eventually we need to leave with Steve hearing both Blackcap and Chiffchaff in the nearby trees. It's a lovely afternoon and we see several Ringlet and Meadow Brown butterflies on our walk back to the minibus. It's major smiles all round as we set off for the hotel and as Julian is new to this area Kathy and Barbara help him navigate the minor roads back to our hotel, which is very appreciated by our guide. Back at the hotel we have time to freshen up before dinner, which is again excellent followed by our nightly ritual of the checklist and the next day's plan – bringing an end to a very successful day.

Day 3

After our 8am breakfast we meet up outside the hotel at 9 o'clock as we are going for another walk straight from here. It's actually quite a nice morning but rain is forecast during the day – fingers crossed it doesn't affect us too much. We walk out towards the local golf course and sea beyond, hearing a Chiffchaff and seeing several of the same species already encountered. At the golf clubhouse we hear a Sedge Warbler that did an occasional song

flight but Steve finds another, which sits right out allowing for good telescope views. We cross the golf course with lots of Reed Buntings and Meadow Pipits around plus Stonechat, Linnet and Goldfinches. The track takes us down to the beautiful, white, sandy beach where we stand for a while looking out to sea. There are lots of Arctic Terns loitering off-shore but Julian gets quite animated when he finds one of several Little Terns flying around – superb. There are Eider in the water and the cliffs under the stunning Dunstanburgh Castle hold a fabulous colony of Kittiwakes. We pick out a couple of Curlew moving north along with loads of hirundines, which are mainly Sand Martin and Swallow. This is brilliant but we need to move on, so Julian leads us back to the coastal path but not before Steve finds a stunning glade of beautiful Pyramidal Orchid. We strike north along the coast taking things slowly as we find Greater Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Common and Greater Black-backed Gulls – all of which are new to our list.

We eventually reach the end of the golf course and reach Newton Pool, a small pool surrounded by reed, mainly of Bulrush. Our plan is to walk past this pool and go for a hot drink in Low Newton by the Sea but it isn't happening as we quickly find a pair of Gadwall and Mike points out a Little Grebe. There are lots of tiny toadlets on and around the main track so we have to be careful where we tread! A little further Julian is scanning the edge of this shallow scrape finding a single Black-tailed Godwit, a nice group of Dunlin and several Common Redshank. There's a nice male Teal across the back of the pool along with good numbers of Wigeon, Mallard and Shelduck – all in all a very good start to the day. This 'scrape' is next to the very quaint village of Low Newton being mainly made up of holiday cottages but there is a pub! It does sell hot drinks and snacks, which is perfect. We find tables outside and go individually to sort out our refreshments in the bar and others sit and scan the passing seabirds. There are the usual Arctic Terns, Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls but again Julian spots more Little Terns and this time a little closer, which is brilliant. There are a few waders flying north across the bay that are mainly Curlew but sharp-eyed David identifies a Bar-tailed Godwit passing rapidly by. It is a lovely interlude but we need to start slowly back along the coastal path.

We retrace our steps back to the Newton Pool scrape where we scan from the north end, seeing much of the same species. However, Julian finds what he was looking for and points out a juvenile Yellow Wagtail, striding around in the grass. This is very well received especially Mike and Barbara who have never seen one before. Then David says to Julian "what's this – a juvenile Dunlin?" He looks through his own telescope and is shocked to find something he is sure is not a Dunlin having a short bill, accentuated primary projection and short pale legs – immediately suspecting Temminck's Stint, a scarce migrant in the UK. Over the next 30 minutes we all help with the

identification as Julian discusses the salient points, agreeing with his view. It is when it's seen alongside a juvenile Yellow Wagtail (being comparative in size) that Julian is 100% happy and releases the news. It's smiles all round as this is a new bird to most of us and we have all contributed to this incredible find. However, Julian is now more than conscious that we need to be back at the hotel for lunch, so off we go this time not stopping at all at the main pool. The walk back is steady and we get back in time and without really rushing, being able to stop for a few Common Scoter in the bay followed by Steve pointing out some cracking Cinnabar Moth caterpillars.

Back at the hotel we have a little time before another excellent meal for lunch as we are setting off for North Shields later in the afternoon for our 'White-beaked Dolphin Cruise'. At 15:30 and with plenty of time we set off for the Royal Quay at North Shields, which is surprisingly delay-free and get there with an hour to spare! This is okay as we have plenty of time to get ready with warm clothing, picnic dinner and waterproofs ahead of our four hour boat trip. A little before 6pm we meet Martin and with a few other people climb aboard an old American lifeboat, which is now being used for fishing and wildlife cruises. We slowly set out into the open sea and at the entrance Ray spots a female Eider, along with Common Terns and several gulls. Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls are our constant companions during the sea journey, giving astonishingly good views from the back of the boat. As we head north along the coast we see our first Guillemots, followed by some plunge-diving Gannets and a Fulmar speeds past. Martin calls a single Razorbill amongst a few Guillemots and there are Curlews, although a couple of Manx Shearwaters called by Julian, is very well received as they fly close by. Sadly there are no cetaceans, which is kind of expected in the choppy seas but we remain vigilant. Just off Newbiggin on Sea we turn back south and go closer inshore still hoping for a dolphin sighting. The last hour is spent slowly trawling the bay's and headlands seeing a Grey Seal hauled out at St Mary's Island – some compensation but we needed to be back at the quay as it was getting dark! At 10pm we say "goodbye and thank you" to Martin before driving back to Embleton, arriving a little over an hour later. A Tawny Owl is calling from the nearby large trees but out of sight, still a nice way to finish this long day.

Day 4

Still a little shell shocked from last night's late finish we meet for breakfast and with the help of nourishment and (for most caffeine) we are ready for a 9pm departure. We drive south towards Cresswell village and at the suggestion of Gill we make a slight detour south of the village to some small sandstone crags called The Scars. This is home to breeding Northern Fulmar and we soon see an adult leaving the nesting ledge not far above the sandy beach. There are lots of Eider out to sea along with a steady stream of Arctic, Common and Sandwich Terns. The high tide has pushed some

waders on to the rocks with lots of Oystercatchers, Common Redshank, Curlew and two Common Sandpipers being seen. It has been an excellent initial and extra site to the day's itinerary and well worth Julian remembering it for subsequent years.

With a full itinerary of coastal site hopping we drive back to Cresswell stopping for an abortive comfort stop as the facilities are locked (surely this is their high season?). C'est la vie. So it's along the minor coast road to Cresswell Pond where we park near the farm and walk out to the hide overlooking the shallow mud and reed-fringed lagoon. For the next hour we sit there quietly checking the birdlife on offer, which is very productive. A Reed Warbler carrying food to the nest right in front of us is fabulous to watch and the waders include Avocets with chicks, Little Ringed Plover with Mike and Barbara discussing a distant Common Sandpiper they are not sure of. Julian scans the line of (mainly) Black-headed Gulls on the shore finding one of his target species of the day – Little Gull. It's an adult moulting into winter plumage and gorgeous, arguably Julian's favourite larid. A Sandwich Tern is also loafing with the other gull and Common Terns are sitting on posts at the far end of the scrape – superb. David calls our first Common Buzzard of the week, which is circling over a distant woodland, incredible it has taken us so long to see Britain's most common raptor. As we have a busy day we drag ourselves away from here and walk slowly back to the minibus seeing Tree Sparrows, Goldfinches, Willow and Sedge Warblers in the nearby bushes and marsh grass. Back at the van Julian hears a 'fishing reel-like' buzz and exclaims "Grasshopper Warbler" immediately then being recognised by Steve, Kathy, Ray and Gill. A scan of the sedge near to where we are standing and Julian finds it in full view and full song – awesome. He even manages to get his telescope trained on it and we all manage to see this usually sculking 'loctustella'.

Flushed with success we drive further north for a short way until we reach the turning to Druridge Pools NR, another fabulous wetland within the Druridge Bay area. Again with limited time we walk straight out to their main hide and settle down at the viewing windows. Immediately we see a small group of lovely summer plumage Black-tailed Godwits, Common Redshank and Curlew. A handsome adult male Yellow Wagtail flies on the lush grassy area in front of us around the ponies that graze this site. Unfortunately it doesn't hang around and flies off to the back of the scrape before we could all see it. Wildfowl is quite varied with Greylag Geese and plenty of 'dabblers' in the network of pools having Gadwall, Mallard, Teal and Wigeon, some in strange eclipse plumage! We have time for one of the other hides that overlooks a deeper pond and here we don't see anything different apart from Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe with chicks, a single Little Grebe and several Mute Swan consequently we don't stay here too long. It is actually nearing lunchtime as Gill says "where has the time gone?"

and in the warm sunshine we wander back stopping for a wee masterclass in 'phyoscopus' I.D. and some 'buttying' with Barbara finding Ringlet, Meadow Brown and Small White along the path edges.

Back at the minibus Julian suggests we have our picnic at the Druridge Bay Country Park as there are toilets there, which is most important. The drive takes about 20 minutes and soon enough we are parking outside the visitor centre, which is inundated with schoolchildren, teachers and parents alike – this will be a quick stop! We all make full use of the facilities except for David who wanders off and finds a pretty secluded corner with picnic tables and more importantly bird feeders with lots of Tree Sparrows. This is our obvious place for lunch and off we go with our bags and bins to take over this corner of the park. It is a welcome break, especially since Mike and Barbara provide some hot water and cups for making a coffee or tea – nice one. The feeders are fabulous to watch and provide brilliant views of commoner species including ones not yet seen. The Tree Sparrows are great but there is also Blue Tit, juvenile Great Tit (well spotted Steve), Chaffinch and Robin to boost the list total. However, we still have a varied afternoon to come so around 13:30 we drive back out of the country park to another wetland back near the coast – East Chevington NR.

This does not take long to reach and after a little confusion we park opposite the track down to a metal box hide. We are greeted at the vehicle by a local representative of the park who kindly points out where the Marsh Harriers are breeding and there is one of the four juveniles sat on a fence post within the extensive phragmites bed. This is great but is quickly eclipsed by the adult male flying in with food, being met by the female and carrying out a food pass – incredible, all within 10 minutes of arriving, some people wait hours to see this interaction! We thank the warden and walk to the main lagoon stopping for some lovely Common Spotted Orchids and Barbara continues to find Large Skipper and Common Blue Damsel amongst the vegetation. We stand outside the hide as its locked (and uncomfortable) where we listen to the cacophony of terns, gulls and reedbed warblers plus the squeal of a Water Rail that would be impossible to see. The large expanse of water has lots of birds but predominantly the same species although we do get better looks at the Common Terns washing themselves just below where we are stood. An island in the middle holds lots more terns and Steve does well picking out a 'short-legged' Arctic along with several larger Sandwich Terns. Still it is pretty quiet and we have seen our target here of Marsh Harrier so back to the vehicle we walk. Julian wants to change from wetland to coast and head up to Amble and check out the activity around Coquet Island just off-shore, looking for Roseate Tern – no arguments here.

Amble is only a few miles away and soon after leaving East Chevington we stop initially at a beach car park opposite the island. There are hundreds of birds off-shore around Coquet but most are too far away to make a reliable identification although there are a few Eider, Common and Arctic Terns closer in. Steve spots our first Red-breasted Merganser of the week and Julian aims his telescope on a Razorbill, giving our first decent view. Excited by the prospect of our boat trip to Coquet Island later in the week we still want to try and find our own 'Rosie' and a visit to Amble Harbour is suggested. This is inspired as it proves to be a wonderful last hour along this stretch of Northumbrian coastline. We park at the entrance to the harbour and walk out towards the sea wall being stopped by a fellow birder who points out a gorgeous full summer plumage Mediterranean Gull stood on the seaweed near the water's edge. Not only is this a great view but when a Black-headed Gull lands next to it we also have a wonderful comparison. On we walk finding Common Gull and then at the harbour mouth we stand and scrutinize the terns that are fishing offshore. This is a challenge as Julian soon says he has found a Roseate Tern amongst the commoner Arctic, Sandwich and Common Terns. It is not easy as the birds keep disappearing behind the harbour wall but we pick a landmark and when Julian sees one he shouts and we do see this pale tern with this 'primary wedge' he describes, but briefly! It is all smiles as we have persevered and Julian knew our planned trip to Coquet Island would produce better (hopefully!) – it is a challenge. Then Steve says "what's this?" as a pale, predominantly black-billed tern with a black line at the wing tips flies right by – Julian calls "Roseate Tern". This is our best view and everyone's happy with Ray exclaiming "now I can tick it!" A fabulous end to the afternoon here.

We set off back towards Embleton, stopping off at the hotel to drop off Kathy and Mike before going on back to Newton Pool. We hope for another look at the Temminck's Stint in better light and we are certainly treated to that, this time being a little closer than the original sighting the day before. A Common Snipe is 'drumming' but we don't see it flying around and many of the same waders are there for us to enjoy on this lovely late afternoon excursion. Around 6pm we return to our hotel with an hour to spare before dinner, which is always useful to relax and freshen up.

Day 5

Today is going to be one of the highlights of the week – a full day on The Farnes visiting tremendous sea cliffs and two of their bigger islands. After an earlier breakfast than normal we set off for Seahouses, which is only 8 miles away and takes a little over 15 minutes. Julian drops everyone off at the harbour and goes back towards the centre of this coastal town to park the minibus, getting back 5 minutes later. Julian then goes and sorts out the boat tickets followed by the fees for landing in two of the islands – Staple and Inner Farnes. We have about half an hour before we are

boarding so we stand and chat whilst looking out into the bay. Just here we see both Little, Sandwich and Arctic Terns, plus some very close Eider and a Pied Wagtail on the harbour wall. A little after our expected departure we are boarding the tripper boat and setting off towards the islands.

The crossing starts well with a fairly close fly-by Gannet, followed by both Guillemot and Razorbill sat on the water. Then we see our first of 1000's of Puffins, with this swimming around in the channel and as we get closer to the sea cliffs the densities of these auks get exponentially bigger. We cruise up towards the rocks and low cliffs that rise out of the North Sea around this archipelago and the sight, sound and smell is an arrest on the senses. The numbers of nesting Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Shags is astonishing with every ledge and crevice being taken by one of these seabirds. We continue to cruise around the small islands seeing more of its spectacle plus numbers of Grey Seals, with some 'hauled out'. There are also Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls looking for an easy meal as they prey on the auks, eggs and young – harsh but it is the natural world. Seabird rookeries are an incredible experience and one we tend to take for granted in the UK being one of the world's great avian spectacles. We are getting it by the bucket load.

After nearly an hour our skipper heads to the small jetty at Stable where we moor in the deep swell, which could make our alighting a little interesting but we all manage without incident. Once on the island we are 'kids in a sweet shop' as our cameras are continually aimed at something, be it a stunning view or an equally stunning (and very close) bird. It is difficult to stop taking photographs but Steve rightly says this also needs to be enjoyed and remembered not just from behind a viewfinder. We have plenty of time on Staple, so Mike and Barbara, David and Gill have their lunches with the rest of us waiting until we return to the boat or on Inner Farne, which is next. Around 1pm we are back on board the vessel and heading back south down this chain until we reach one of the southernmost – Inner Farne and this is temland!

We are enthralled by Sable with its auks, shags and guillemots but the constant noise and barrage from the predominant Arctic Terns is just unbelievable. Inner Farne has a network of boardwalks around the island to protect the breeding birds but the tern chicks just don't care. These cuties of all shapes and sizes sit around waiting for their parents to bring food and blend in well with the wooden slats – consequently there are the occasional fatality from clumsy humans. Larger Sandwich Terns are also breeding on Inner Farne along with Common Tern, Black-headed Gull, Puffin, Guillemot and Razorbill. This is also home to St Cuthbert's chapel – home to the story of these islands legendary heroine, Grace Darling and

well worth a visit. We wander round individually or in couples having our own personal experiences with our 'feathered friends'. Puffins with beaks full of sprats, birds feeding their young, being dive-bombed by the aggressive Arctic Terns (or worse!). Julian sees one strange occurrence with a Meadow Pipit carrying a lovely silver sprat in its beak, which it could have been offering to its chicks? It is getting towards our leaving time and Julian gets to the jetty ahead of the rest and decides to check the nearby Arctic Terns in the hope of finding a much, much rarer Roseate. This wasn't to be but he does get some compensation from finding small groups of both Turnstone and Knot. This is brilliant especially since one of the Knot is still in 'orange' breeding plumage and looks amazing – something we rarely see in Britain. Our boat arrives and slightly behind schedule we board and expect to leave for the mainland – how wrong are we?

The skipper has been given word of a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins just offshore from Bamburgh Castle, a little north of Seahouses. He makes for the area and after about 10 minutes we get a sighting of our first cetaceans of the week. We join the pod as they play in the water, leaping, spy-hopping and following the boat with some fantastic close views – what an incredible way to finish this truly memorable day. After about thirty minutes we leave the dolphins heading slowly north to make our way back to Seahouses harbour, we are late back but nobody minds and even the rain holds off until we get there. This was always touted as being the highlight of our week being based around this excursion and it certainly did not disappoint and understandably why it is most people's 'place of the trip'

Late afternoon we return straight back to the hotel a little earlier than normal but noone minds at all, we can relax and reflect on our own personal memories from this extraordinary day.

Day 6

This is our inland day with a drive to the famous Kielder Forest dam and a 'flyer' after breakfast sees us on the road well before 9am. Our journey takes us through the rural back roads and villages where we see our first Pheasant en-route but a fuel and comfort stop in Bellingham is more notable for finding a Grey Wagtail on the town's river. We wind our way up to the natural park that is south of the Cheviot Hills making our first stop at the south end of the dam. It's quiet apart from David spotting a distant Common Buzzard and hearing a few Siskin in the nearby conifer forest, so we move on. The next stop is about half way along the dam at some random car park, which is slightly more productive with good views of Siskin, Coal Tit and Goldcrests, which are all new to the list. Julian decides we should head up to the Kielder Castle visitor centre and see if we can glean some information on the breeding Ospreys and Red Squirrel viewing hides. This is at the north end of the dam and in the edge of Kielder village, which is easily found in this massive (predominantly) coniferous forest.

Sadly the centre is somewhat lacking in information, which disappoints Barbara as she enjoys using their flyers and booklets, however, we do find the track to a feeding station and with our lunches we walk up the winding track to the hide. The walk is very good with David finding first a Treecreeper followed by a Nuthatch, we hear Long-tailed Tit and Julian spots a Spotted Flycatcher, which sadly disappears too quickly. We add Gruffalo to our mammal list outside the hide and go in this modern looking cabin with viewing windows onto (mostly empty) feeders. Although we have an excellent hour eating our picnics and getting good looks at two more Spotted Flycatchers, Blackcap (found by Ray), Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Treecreeper and several Chaffinches but sadly no Red Squirrels. Eventually we leave and walk slowly back to the parking area, where we see Great Spotted Woodpecker overhead.

The Kielder experience is becoming a little difficult but one last stop at Leapliph brings back a little parity as we first visit another 'Red Squirrel' hide. No squirrels (but a drey!) but there are lots of Chaffinches plus great views of another Great Spotted Woodpecker, Siskin, several tit species and lots of Chaffinches on the available feeders – brilliant. Apparently there is an Osprey watch here on a weekend, which suggests a visible eyrie so back at the minibus Julian scans the forest across the dam with his telescope. He finds the platform with a nest and in view are two Ospreys. This is brilliant apart from the fact they are that far away they are probably closer to Scotland, causing for some amount of sarcasm and rightly so!

Happy in the knowledge that Kielder Forest and Dam has produced most of what we had hoped to see and with the chance of seeing another scarce British bird we leave the natural park and drive back to Bellingham. With the invaluable help of Barbara we negotiate the minor roads south until we reach a small body of water called Grindon Lough. This is a great place being on the south side of Hadrian's Wall and in full view of the Roman archeological site of Housesteads Castle, however our history lesson is put on the back burner as we are here for another diminutive wader – Red-necked Phalarope, which has resided here for over a month! It takes Julian just a few minutes to find this very rare Scottish breeding bird as it swims along picking insects off the water's surface just below our position on the roadside – superb! We get excellent telescope views of it before flying across the lake and disappearing into the sparse grasses along the edge – how lucky are we! We hang around now watching the Teal, Tufted Duck and Mallard, with lots of Lapwing in the adjacent fields. Frustratingly, we can hear Lesser Redpoll in the nearby Silver Birch but finding one proves impossible. Late afternoon we leave the Lough and head back towards Newcastle then our hotel, stopping en-route for Julian to have a Yellow Fever vaccination in Morpeth. Dinner had been organised for

slightly later than normal which was good thinking as we don't get back to Embleton until after 6:30pm but again no-one is complaining after another terrific and productive day.

Day 7

Our final full day starts very well as we make a pre-breakfast visit to Embleton Moor where we park by the extensive wheat fields and listen! Dave points out where he had heard it the previous day but initially it is silence apart from Yellowhammer, Skylark and a Whitethroat scolding us from a nearby hedge for being too close! Then Julian and Steve catch the distinctive 'wetmylips' call of Quail, which is always a thrill. It becomes more obvious as we walk slowly towards the source of the call and enjoy the quintessential sound of farmland for a few minutes. We don't have too much time and we leave for a quick visit to Julian's favourite place - Newton Pools. A quick check of the bay reveals a Red-breasted Merganser and at the pools we discover the Temminck's Stint has departed overnight. However we do find a beautiful Common Snipe sat on the edge of the water along with a couple of adult Dunlin, showing an incredible difference in size, which is interesting! Sadly we have to say "goodbye" to this very good site and return to the hotel for breakfast. A little after 9am we settle down in the restaurant for our penultimate morning feast.

Today is all about our final boat journey around the small tern and auk covered Coquet Island just off-shore from Amble. The forecast is good until early afternoon and the boatman is confident of a sailing, which is especially pleasing for Ray who had it cancelled the previous year. At 10am we head out along the coastal route south to the small harbour town of Amble and park at the jetty with plenty of time before sailing. The tide is rising and on the exposed sandbars we see Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls, Sandwich Tern, Eider and Oystercatchers. Eventually the 'David Gray' boat arrives with the man himself at the helm along with another crew member/friend. It is such a lovely family business that has operated for years and Mike is spot on saying it's like characters out of 'Last of the Summer Wine!'

We set off from Amble and very slowly chug across to this wee island which is dominated by a lighthouse at the south end. We are given an undecipherable history of the place over the tannoy from David, which is quite amusing to us all. The seabirds start to appear close to the boat, with Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills on the water and the odd Gannet, Fulmar and Kittiwake flying by. The whole island is surrounded by birds that look like insects buzzing around spilt sugar – just incredible and as we get close we start to really see the tern and auk colony in its glorious entirety. Arctic, Common and Sandwich Terns fly back and forth with Julian managing to pick out a couple of Roseate Terns before getting to the south end. This is where all the UK's nesting Roseate Terns breed and the RSPB need

to make sure this haven is fully protected hence there is no landing on this island owned by the Duke of Northumberland. David Gray is both a skilled boatman and knows where the birds breed and soon we are within metres of several of these beautiful birds – Steve is in raptures with this. It is another fabulous experience of sight, sound and smell, something a camera cannot always convey but a memory can – and we are getting bucket loads! The trip is just an hour and all too quickly we are heading back to Amble quay with David coming out of the wheelhouse to have a chat with us, which is brilliant and incredibly interesting as he's has been visiting Coquet for over 40 years.

Back in Amble we say our “thank you and goodbyes” before walking back to the minibus in the now warm sunshine but it does look slightly threatening. Julian has made the decision we would stick to plan despite the forecast and we head to Craster back along the coastal route. About thirty minutes later we park in the allotted place, which is next to both facilities and an excellent visitor centre. With time to spare we take some and go in for a while getting a little retail therapy, which is actually very welcome and productive. Barbara really enjoys this as she comes back with an armful of books, information leaflets and flyers on this wonderful area. Today her and Mike have brought out their traveling bears – Chester and Cardiff who sit quietly in the minibus with their binoculars waiting to leave! Once ready we collect our lunches and wander down towards the village and harbour where we sit looking out to sea with the picnic – superb. Julian spots a cetacean just off-shore but it's moving rapidly south, however we do see the diagnostic all-dark body and small triangular dorsal fin of a Harbour Porpoise, which is great. During lunch and exactly when the forecast predicted it starts to spit a little but nothing too bad. We are all still keen to walk the coastal path to Dunstanburgh Castle, which is exactly what we do.

We have got our waterproofs on and set off slowly stopping to check the sea periodically, which is initially very productive as Julian points out a small pod of Bottlenose Dolphin, working their way north. It is just brilliant to see these cetaceans in British waters and in such a stunning situation with the rugged Northumberland coastline as the backdrop. We continue in the drizzle, north along the coastal path continually checking the sea but it's a stunning close male Linnet that grabs our attention and receives paparazzi treatment from our keen photographers. The fabulous Dunstanburgh Castle is getting ever closer as keen-eyed Kathy spots a Rock Pipit down on the rocks (who would have thought it!) and get some good looks at only our second of the week. Just before the castle we check a small sedge-fringed pool that is quite productive with Moorhen, Mallard, Stonechat, Pied Wagtail and Reed Bunting. Here we split up with Steve, Mike and Barbara venturing in to look around this impressive ruined castle,

Kathy, David and Gill continuing on to Embleton, Julian and Ray walking back to Craster for the minibus. We leave the historians to their walk and the rest of us carry on round the back of the castle to a small sea cliff covered in Kittiwakes, Razorbill and Guillemots. It is here that Kathy again spots the 'bird of the walk' by finding our only Northern Wheatear of the week – nice one. The individual walk back doesn't produce anything new but thankfully the Wheatear is seen by Barbara, Mike and Steve on their return to the hotel.

Eventually we all reach the hotel by 5pm and with the weather being so inclement and the need to pack we decide to just meet up for dinner at 7pm. Our last evening meal is, as it has been all week – excellent and definitely one of the holiday highlights. After dinner we find somewhere for the checklist and as always with Speyside Wildlife holidays the review of the weeks highlights, which are many and varied – bringing to a close a very memorable tour of the N/E of England, which produced no fewer than nine species of gull...

Day 8

Nothing on today as after our final breakfast, we are leaving to go our separate ways - we say 'goodbye and thank you' to Julian for what has been a terrific and interesting week. He is heading back to Newcastle train station with Steve and Kathy before their journey's south, he is also meeting his friend Kathy to return her OS maps and binoculars, which ended up being a Godsend for Gill.

Species of the Trip

David – Arctic Tern/Temminck's Stint

Gill – Temminck's Stint

Mike – Bonaparte's Gull

Barbara – (Red) Knot

Kathy – Grasshopper Warbler/Temminck's Stint

Steve – Grasshopper Warbler/Temminck's Stint

Ray – Bonaparte's Gull

Julian – Roseate Tern

Place of the Trip

David – Farne Islands

Gill – Coquet Island

Mike – Farne Islands

Barbara – Farne Islands

Kathy – Farne Islands

Steve – Farne Islands particularly Staple Island

Ray – Farne Islands

Julian – Newton Pools

Magic Moment

David – Watching the Arctic Terns on Inner Farne

Gill – The sound of the terns on Inner Farne

Mike – The crew in the Coquet Island boat trip

Barbara – Seeing the Bottlenose Dolphins from the boat

Kathy – Getting to land on Staple Island

Steve – Seeing the Arctic Terns so close

Ray – Having an Arctic Tern peck my head on Inner Farne

Julian – Finding the Temminck's Stint

BIRDS

Little Grebe
Great Crested Grebe
Manx Shearwater
Fulmar
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Grey Heron
Little Egret
Mute Swan
Canada Goose
Greylag Goose
Shelduck
Wigeon
Teal
Gadwall
Mallard
Tufted Duck
Eider
Common Scoter
Red-breasted Merganser
Osprey
Common Buzzard
Marsh Harrier
Sparrowhawk
Kestrel
Pheasant
Moorhen
Coot
Water Rail (heard only)
Quail (heard only)
Oystercatcher
Avocet
Lapwing
Little Ringed Plover
Ringed Plover
Dunlin
Knot
Snipe
Black-tailed Godwit
Bar-tailed Godwit (David only)
Whimbrel
Curlew
Common Redshank
Greenshank
Common Sandpiper
Temminck's Stint
Turnstone
Red-necked Phalarope
Black-headed Gull
Mediterranean Gull
Common Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Kittiwake
Little Gull
Bonaparte's Gull
Sandwich Tern
Little Tern
Common Tern
Arctic Tern
Roseate Tern
Guillemot
Razorbill
Puffin
Feral Pigeon
Woodpigeon
Collared Dove
Tawny Owl (heard only)
Barn Owl (David/Gill post dinner walk)
Common Swift
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Skylark
Sand Martin
Swallow
House Martin
Meadow Pipit
Rock Pipit
Yellow Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Pied Wagtail
Wren
Dunnock
Robin
Northern Wheatear
Blackbird
Song Thrush

Sedge Warbler
Eurasian Reed Warbler
Grasshopper Warbler
Whitethroat
Blackcap
Willow Warbler
Chiffchaff
Goldcrest
Spotted Flycatcher
Long-tailed Tit (heard only)
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Trecreeper
Nuthatch
Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Chaffinch
Goldfinch
Siskin
Linnet
Lesser Redpoll (heard only)
Yellowhammer
Reed Bunting

TOTAL BIRDS: 117

MAMMALS

Rabbit
Brown Hare
Harbour Porpoise
Bottlenose Dolphin
Grey Seal
Common Seal

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Common Toad

BUTTERFLIES & INSECTS

Small White
Ringlet
Meadow Brown
Large Skipper
Common Blue
Blue-tailed Damsel
Common Blue Damsel
6-spot Burnet
Cinnabar Moth Caterpillars

NOTABLE PLANTS

Common Spotted Orchid
Pyramidal Orchid
Bloody Crane's-bill
Harebell
Thrift
Biting Stonecrop

TOTAL SPECIES: 139