

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

HUMBER ESTUARY

17-24 OCTOBER 2026

Guide: Sally Nowell

Guests: David Smith, Sheila Rawson, Dawn Chambers, Gaye Henson, Heather James, Vivien Emery

Day 1 We all arrive safely at our comfortable Georgian hotel based in the countryside just outside the historic town of Beverley.

Day 2 We start with a bit of birding in the hotel grounds. Dawn has had a mammal fest this morning seeing Fox, Stoat and Brown Hare on her pre-breakfast walk. After breakfast we head east and then south towards Spurn Head. We weave our way through the villages of Holderness, a vast lowland area famed for its rich and fertile soil. We first visit an area known as 'The Outstrays' through which the new King Charles III footpath goes. We are pleased to be greeted by the calls of Redshank and immediately have a Black-tailed Godwit fly over. We scan the marshland scrapes in front of us spotting both godwits, Grey Plover, Shelduck and Dunlin along with large numbers of Curlew and Redshank. We can see thousands of birds out on the water's edge and closer in some large wader flocks that are just too far away to identify.

We return to the minibus and retrace our steps to find another road down to 'The Outstrays' at Weeton. Here we get better views of a large flock of Avocet and mixed Godwit and once again huge flocks of small waders further out on the estuary. We enjoy the waders here, but the light is difficult, we are looking right into the sun, so we move on.

We stop at Kilnsea, by this time it's lunch time so we park up and do some sea watching whilst eating our lunch. We spot Red-throated Diver, and an extremely distant Leaches Petrel is seen by some. Recognising that sea watching in the very rough conditions isn't for everyone we move on the Kilnsea wetland only to discover that it's not currently wet at all, it's just dry mud so we move on to Beacon ponds where we have Dark-bellied Brent Geese, Barnacle Goose, Curlew Sandpiper and Knot. It's pretty windy here and not easy birding

so we return to the minibus and move onto the Spurn visitor centre for a cup of tea and a walk along part of 'the triangle'. Here David, Viv, Sheila and Dawn walk on and get some great views of our first winter thrushes, Redwings and a single Fieldfare.

We drive home in some glorious late afternoon light and spot numerous Kestrels along our route. We must have seen 15 or more today. We stop at Patrington Church and decide to go inside, we are lucky its open. As we start to explore this interesting and rather spectacular church a gentleman enters the church explaining he has had rather too much to drink but is here to lock up the church. We have quite a laugh with him as he tells us about the church's history. He's a little embarrassed at his inebriated state but he gives us lots of information and its' good to see he's had quite an afternoon!

We head back to the hotel taking a brief detour to look for Barn Owl, no owl but some delightful and relaxed Brown Hare in a field and we find out what the geese are that we can hear from the hotel. A large flock of Greylags with some white 'farmyard geese' mixed in with them. We enjoy the evening sunset before returning to the hotel and a delicious roast dinner.

Day 3 We are heading south today towards the River Humber but stopping short at the wonderful Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve, North Cave wetlands, four guests favourite place of the trip. Sadly, the rain we thought was going to stop just got heavier on our journey and started to put a bit of a dampener on the day but by the time we arrived the rain had stopped and there was even a glimpse of blue sky.

We aim to spend most of the day here so can amble around the hides at our leisure. We walk from hide to hide enjoying sifting through the different birds and watching their comings and goings from squabbling Teal to bathing Curlew. Out in the fields a group of Curlew are joined by a pair of Ruff and we watch large groups of Starlings feeding like Martins on the flies along with the Black-headed Gulls. A highlight of our sightings was a Water Rail who came out and was on view for a good 20 minutes in glorious morning sunshine.

The autumn colours of the mixed plantings around the reserve are beautiful. We hope to catch sight of Jack Snipe that had been seen this week but instead enjoy the Common Snipe. Another rarity we hope to see is a Pectoral Sandpiper and we are lucky with this one and got some great views. Some showy Ruff

caught our eye too. Large numbers of Lapwing are present in the lagoon and a good mix of duck including handsome Gadwall. A fly over of nine Whooper Swans is a delight of the day as well as a feeding Greenshank.

We walk along the track to some Oak trees and are followed by a large group of Long-tailed Tits, Goldfinch and Great Tits. We certainly got a lot out of our day here with five raptors including great views of Marsh Harrier and Red Kite and a Peregrine fly past disturbing all the waders. Overhead large flock of Golden Plover and David spots two showing Golden roosting amongst the Lapwing in the afternoon sun.

We leave North Cave and head to the banks of the Humber at Faxfleet. We take a slow drive across the flat fields surrounding the river looking for waders, we have Curlew and Lapwing and our first Jay. At the bank above the reedbed we gaze out expectantly. In the distance Sally spots a Barn Owl and just as she's trying to describe where it is one flies out right in front of us, we all manage to get a good look but watching Barn Owls can never be for quite long enough so we hope it might return. Inland we see a group of Pink-footed Geese and a single Roe Deer but the reedbeds are pretty quiet except for a pair of Stonechat and the frequent call of Cetti's Warbler. We take a drive along the riverbank hoping for another glimpse of the Barn Owl and get a very brief view as it flies out of a roadside tree. We return to the hotel via country lanes hoping for more owl activity.

Day 4 We spend today at the coast again, heading up to Flamborough. Yesterday the winds were favourable for the arrival of migrants, and it was difficult to decide which direction to head in. Flamborough seems a good option, so we head out towards Bridlington. We arrive in the car park at South Landing to find very few cars which kind of didn't seem like a good sign, as all the birds reported must be elsewhere.

We set off down the road to the shore in quite a brisk wind so it is not good for listening for activity. We see a few Blackbirds, probably migrants, feeding in the Hawthorn. We soon reach the shore and scan out across the rough sea and along the rocky shoreline. We have Curlew and Turnstone and Rock Pipit too. Out to sea we have Red-throated Diver, a few Shags flying by and a beautiful group of male Eider in gorgeous light fly by. As always on this trip there's a Kestrel hovering in the wind off the cliffs. A few more birders appear and we exchange

notes, it seems everyone is hoping to see something but haven't as yet, we are all in the same boat but we are very happy with our Eider fly past.

We leave the seats at the shore and head up the bank into the woodland, on our way we come upon a group of Long-tailed Tits, we seem to be seeing them everywhere we go. We walk expectantly and quietly stopping and checking every bird that flits by, Treecreeper is our only new species. We start to see a gathering crowd ahead, Viv is with them, she's taken a different route to us, she has all the gen and is ready with her ipad to show us what's been spotted, it's a "Mega" a Rufous-tailed Robin. But as more and more folk descend on this quiet corner in the woods there is no sign of the bird. We watch and wait for 20 minutes or so but as the crowds gather and tapes start getting played, we decide this isn't really for us and head back to the minibus, the car park has really started to fill up now, this is a serious twitch!

We move round to the lighthouse where we are told Firecrest has been seen. We make our way to the Elderflower bush where it's been spotted and stare into it for 20 minutes. A Redpoll pops up, another birder says it's a Mealy Redpoll, discussion follows about whether Mealy Redpoll still exists, or are all Redpolls now just Redpolls?? We don't see the Firecrest and are rather distracted by seawatching.

Out to sea we have Gannets, Kittiwakes and Grey Seal. We head back for lunch which we have sitting with a wonderful view of Flamborough Bay. Unfortunately, everyone gets a bit chilled, so we have one final try for Firecrest, getting good views of Goldcrest for our troubles and decide more time on the breezy cliff tops isn't what everyone wants to do. So, we head back towards Beverley with plan b and c which work perfectly. Sally, David and Viv walk along the canal close to the hotel and everyone else spends time visiting Beverley Minster and doing a spot of shopping. A successful end to a more relaxed day.

Day 5

We make our way through country roads towards RSPB Blacktoft Sands Reserve. We are hoping we might see Grey Partridge but despite checking every field and edge as we go, we see nothing but a few Pheasants.

We are soon heading down the M62 to Goole and then down the back roads to Blacktoft. The different villages all seem to be mad for Halloween with all sorts of pumpkin and ghostly displays. We arrive at Blacktoft and walk to our first hide really hoping for a sight of Bearded Tit. Sadly the water levels at Blacktoft have

been affected by the very dry summer and there are very few birds about. Sally catches a glimpse of Water Rail, and we have a small group of sleeping Black-tailed Godwit and a couple of Snipe but no other waders on the lagoons at all.

We chat to other birders, and they haven't seen much either except one lady who has seen a Kingfisher. We head to the place she saw it and wait expectantly and hopefully. Whilst we do there's a dozing Grey Heron on the far bank, we enjoy watching it preening and dropping off to sleep in the morning warmth. A Kestrel perches across from us and then suddenly Sheila spots the Kingfisher as it calls and whizzes past us all, perching on a Willow just past the hide, we all get a good look and its off again, this time perching on a post nearby for us all to see and enjoy before its off again and this time it doesn't return.

We have lunch on the benches at Blacktoft before heading away back towards Hull. As we leave, we scan the fields again in the hope of finding Grey Partridge and then suddenly, in a roadside field, a small covey of Grey Partridge, joy all round, a gorgeous group we all see but nowhere to park, so sadly a rather brief though good view.

We drive a little further and decide to take a random side road to see if we might find any more Grey Partridge, not far along, we spot a Hen Harrier crossing the road ahead of us and then quartering a field before plunging into the vegetation, it disappears from view but quite an unexpected sight on this rather damp afternoon. Excited by our sightings we head back into Goole and then make our way around Hull and out to Welwick. Sadly, by now the forecast heavy rain has descended and the roads are running with water.

We take a road to our next destination and on the way down Sally spots two Little Owls perched on top of a barn!!! We can hardly believe it, one disappears as we reverse for a better view but not everyone in the van can see, a bit of driving forward and then back and raising visors, there's a bit of chaos to make sure everyone gets a view and everyone eventually does, how fabulous, we've been looking and hoping we would see one.

We continue to a parking place chatting to a birder on the way, he tells us there's loads of birds, including two Yellow-browed Warblers but by the time we arrive its' raining pretty persistently and though our determined group bravely don their waterproofs and go in search we manage one new bird, a Pintail but not very

much else for our efforts and worst of all Gaye realises her waterproof isn't waterproof anymore! Not the most comfortable or productive walk but we did see a Little Owl and another Hen Harrier. We return to the hotel.

Day 6

We are making the most of the weather today, the forecast is good, so we head back down to the Humber Estuary and 'The Outstrays.' We start with a search for Yellow-browed Warbler and Firecrest but only find Goldcrests but probably migrants. The hedgerows here are filled with birds but they are all a bit elusive. We do pick up Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting. As we walk along the track we can see more and more birds, they are very flighty, so we view them from a distance through the scope. A mix of finches, Blackbirds and Song Thrushes. Much to our delight a couple of Brambling join them and a rather handsome Fieldfare.

We continue walking towards an area we visited in the rain the previous afternoon, everyone is in better spirits today. We meet the local bird recorder who is interested in our Brambling sighting and tells us a bit about the area. We are delighted to spot a Clouded Yellow butterfly and David spots a stunning male Hen Harrier being mobbed by a crow which is quite a surprise. We enjoy flocks of Fieldfare, Blackbirds and Redwing flitting around the bushes, but they are all diving into the bushes out of sight. We make our way back to the minibus stopping by a ditch where we have a Green Sandpiper fly down. Again, we enjoy the huge mixed flocks, with 12 different species in them. Also feeding with them we find four Grey Partridges. We have lunch here and take a quick look out over the wetland area, a large flock of Avocet fly in the distance and it's wonderful to hear the Curlew calling in the from the marsh.

We have had a full morning of birding and head back along the north bank of the Humber, through the outskirts of Hull and then over the Humber Bridge to Alkborough. We have time for a cup of tea at the local café and then head onto the marsh. Disappointingly the lagoon here which is normally filled with birdlife has no water in it, so we wander in the hope of finding Bearded Tit. Sadly the reeds are silent and at 4 pm there is not much sign of life here except for the occasional explosive burst of sound from a Cettis Warbler. We do visit the hide overlooking what is now a bare mud patch and start to see a few Marsh Harriers drifting in to roost.

Though the hide is quite cosy we need to have a bit of height to overlook the reeds as the afternoon sun begins to set. We reach the bank and find a bench.

We start to look out over the reeds, looking and listening for Bearded Tit. Dawn suddenly spots a Barn Owl, it flies right past us giving us a superb view, over the next hour we watch two Barn Owls and possibly a third more distant one hunt the area close to us. As we do, we also spot increasing numbers of Marsh Harrier coming in to roost, David and Viv count 11 in the air at once. We see huge flocks of Starlings flying over and skeins of Pink-footed Geese. It's all suddenly bursting into life just as the sun is setting. The evening light is beautiful as we watch the owls hunting but to our alarm the Barn Owls are being chased by the Marsh Harriers, they must run the gauntlet of them every evening, but they are just getting on with hunting the verges here. As the sun sets it starts to get cooler and we decide its time to head back to the hotel, it's been quite a full day.

Day 7 Today we are heading north over the Yorkshire Wolds to Robert Fullers Gallery. When we arrive, we enjoy a warm welcome and a cup of coffee but are sorry to hear Robert is unwell and can't join us, but Robert is as determined as ever and we end up spending over an hour with him as he tells us about his latest film projects. He's particularly excited about one involving filming Bullfinches which we are all looking forward to seeing. We are particularly fascinated to hear about his detailed observations including the fact that egg laying seems to be a rather painful and exhausting experience for birds as he witnessed the female Bullfinch needing a sleep after egg laying.

Robert shows us round the garden and as we are saying our thank yous we hear a kafuffle in the woodland, it sounds like a Tawny Owl is being harassed, Robert dives into the woodland with us in pursuit. We spot the owl flying twice, but Gaye who is outside the wood, gets the best view with the owl flying right past her as it tries to escape its pursuers. We manage a bit of Christmas shopping in the gallery and enjoy watching some of Robert's films and his beautiful art.

We head down the valleys of the Yorkshire Wolds looking for Peregrine but instead coming across a couple of Ravens unexpectedly. The area is full of Pheasants and Partridges, its amazing the Red Kites and Common Buzzards we are seeing are tolerated. We find a layby for lunch and scan the steep sides of the valleys for birds but find only a couple of Roe Deer and a Brown Hare that quickly disappears once it knows it's been spotted.

From here we cut over the Wolds to RSPB Bempton Cliffs. We know the cliffs will be empty but there have been lots of reports of migrants dropping in here. We arrive to see quite a few men peering into bushes. We join them but see

only a fleeting glimpse of a Yellow-browed Warbler and so we head to the cliff tops. There really is very little on the cliffs or out to sea, just a couple of Gannets and not much more. We make our way back to the visitor centre for one last try for migrants. Heather and Sheila decide to walk further along the cliffs and enjoy watching a hunting Barn Owl. The rest of the group head back to the bushes and are rewarded with views of Pallas' and Yellow-browed Warbler though it is rather challenging to get a good view with them being so mobile within the dense growth, but we are pleased we persevered just before our birding for the trip comes to an end, the last new bird of the trip is Pallas' Warbler, not bad.

We agree to meet up and leave at 4.30 and as we can hear some loud rumbles of thunder nobody delays returning to the minibus. The first drops of rain come just before we leave and just after we leave the heavens open with a total deluge, thank goodness we were not on the cliff tops, we would have been soaked to the skin in moments. We drive through very heavy rain but some spectacular dark skies and fork lightning back to the hotel to prepare for our journeys home.

Day 8 David and Sheila are up early hoping to get their journeys home completed before the forecast storm and yellow weather warning. Heather, Viv and Gaye are heading to York station with Sally hoping their journeys will not be disrupted and Dawn is heading south to visit family. By the end of the day everyone has safely reached their destinations.

BIRDS

Mute Swan
Whooper Swan
Russian White-fronted Goose
Pink-footed Goose
Greylag Goose
Canada Goose
Barnacle Goose
Dark-bellied Brent Goose
Shelduck
Mallard
Gadwall
Pintail
Shoveler
Wigeon
Teal
Tufted Duck
Eider
Red-legged Partridge
Grey Partridge
Pheasant
Red-throated Diver
Little Grebe
Manx Shearwater
Leaches Petrel
Gannet
Cormorant
Shag
Little Egret
Grey Heron
Red Kite
Marsh Harrier
Hen Harrier
Common Buzzard
Sparrowhawk
Kestrel
Peregrine
Water Rail
Moorhen
Coot
Oystercatcher
Avocet
Ringed Plover
Golden Plover
Grey Plover

Lapwing
Knot
Turnstone
Dunlin
Green Sandpiper
Redshank
Greenshank
Black-tailed Godwit
Bar-tailed Godwit
Curlew
Snipe
Ruff
Pectoral Sandpiper
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Kittiwake
Feral Pigeon
Rock Dove
Stock Dove
Woodpigeon
Collared Dove
Barn Owl
Tawny Owl
Little Owl
Kingfisher
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Skylark
Rock Pipit
Meadow Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Dunnock
Robin
Stonechat
Song Thrush
Redwing
Mistle Thrush
Fieldfare
Blackbird
Cetti's Warbler
Chiffchaff
Yellow-browed Warbler

Pallas' Warbler
Goldcrest
Wren
Great Tit
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Treecreeper
Magpie
Jay
Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow
Raven
Starling
House Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Chaffinch
Brambling
Linnet
Redpoll
Goldfinch
Greenfinch
Bullfinch
Reed Bunting
Yellowhammer

MAMMALS

Fox
Grey Seal
Harbour Porpoise
Roe Deer
Grey Squirrel
Brown Hare
Rabbit
Brown Rat

'OTHER THINGS'

Common Darter
Migrant Hawker
Willow Emerald Damselfly
European Hornet
"Yellow Ladybird"
Clouded Yellow
Ink Cap
Trooping Crumble Cap
White Dead Nettle
Red Dead Nettle
Meadowsweet
White Campion

Favourite Species

Sheila	Geese and swans in flight
Gaye	Owls
David	Owls, particularly so many Barn Owls, we had seven sightings with great views
Dawn	Barn Owls
Viv	Kestrels, so many everywhere we went
Heather	Little Owl
Sally	Grey Partridge

Favourite Place

Sheila	North Cave Wetlands and Robert Fullers Garden
Gaye	North Cave Wetlands and Patrington Church
David	North Cave Wetlands
Dawn	North Cave Wetlands and the Outstrays
Viv	Alkborough
Heather	The lane at The Outstrays
Sally	The Outstrays

Magic Moment

Sheila	Seeing the Kingfisher and Grey Heron so close up.
Gaye	The sunset, Barn Owls and Marsh Harriers at Alkborough
David	Walk on day one at Spurn seeing the Fieldfare and Redwing so well and seeing the male Hen Harrier
Dawn	Walking in the garden at the hotel and seeing the Stoat and Brown Hare
Viv	Seeing the male Hen Harrier
Heather	The evening at Alkborough
Sally	The evening at Alkborough