

The Fens in winter 26-30 January 2026

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Tour summary

Winter can obviously be cold and wet, but is a great time for wintering wildfowl and waterbirds in the East Anglian Fens. During the tour, we covered fenland reserves in Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk as well as popping into Thetford Forest. We encountered large numbers of Whooper Swans, among which were Bewick's Swans and even Tundra Bean Geese. Other exciting species and highlights included Glossy Ibis, close views of Long-eared Owls and several Common Cranes.



Day 1: Arrival and Lynford Arboretum

We met at The Bramley House Hotel at midday and loaded our equipment into the van. The hour-long drive took us through the characteristic landscape of The Fens – past several fields of **Whooper Swans**, spotting multiple **Kestrels**, **Cormorants** and even a **Goosander** – and into The Breckland. Our destination was Lynford Arboretum, on the edge of Thetford Forest. Almost as soon as we set off, we came across a flock of **Long-tailed Tits** flitting between the pine trees, they were accompanied by **Blue Tits**, **Coal Tits**, **Great Tits**, **Goldcrest**, **Nuthatch** and two **Treecreepers**. This was the first time our group had met, so we got to know each other as we walked through the arboretum, seeing more birds along the way: **Chaffinch**, **Greenfinch**, **Goldfinch** and **Fieldfare**. By the bridge, we saw another mixed tit flock, which included **Marsh Tit** and **Siskins**. The bright red back of a male **Crossbill** perched in a tree caught our attention, standing out against the grey sky; there was a small group, which also included a first-year bird. After enjoying this group of birds, we headed to Lynford Lake – passing emerging **Snowdrops** – where we were able to see **Tufted Duck**, **Great Crested Grebe** and **Common Buzzard**. As the light faded, we boarded the van and made our way back to the hotel to settle in, chat about the week ahead and enjoy our first evening meal.

Day checklist: 39 species

Day 2: Wicken Fen NNR and Welney WWT

The morning of day two was very wet and windy, so we headed to Wicken Fen NNR where we could shelter in multiple hides. Our first hide overlooked Adventurers' Fen, where we saw **Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Little Egret, Meadow Pipit** and an adult female **Marsh Harrier** with a sub-adult male, plus a herd of very soggy Konik ponies. From the boardwalk hide we saw a splendid adult male Marsh Harrier. Walking back, we saw **Reed Bunting** and heard **Cetti's Warbler**.

In the afternoon, we drove to Welney WWT. From the windows of the café, overlooking Lady Fen, there were so many birds to see: from hundreds of **Lapwings** to a large skein of **Pink-footed Geese**, as well as **Great White Egret, Shelduck**, and a **Tree Sparrow** among a flock of **House Sparrows**. A total of 40 **Common Cranes** were also counted, providing multiple members of our group with their first views of wild cranes in Britain.

After enjoying great views of the cranes, and also watching a kerfuffle between three **Chinese Water Deer**, we headed over the bridge to the famous main hide. There we enjoyed very close views of **Whooper Swans** with several Mallard and male **Pochard**. Walking back, as the light faded, a **Cattle Egret** landed on the bank near the hide.



Day checklist: 49 species

Day 3: Nene Washes RSPB and Deeping Lakes

Day three began at Nene Washes RSPB where we were joined by Josh Jones of BirdGuides. In contrast to the previous day, there were blue skies. Josh had located four **Long-eared Owls** in a line of scrub, which we enjoyed fabulous views of through telescopes. A flock of five **Common Cranes** stole our attention. We would see several more in the course of our walk along the bank, as well as thousands of **Lapwings** alongside which were **European Golden Plover**. We were also able to look at **Whooper** and **Bewick's Swans** side by side, later seeing both species even closer in a roadside field, clearly seeing juveniles of the two species. Walking back to the van, we saw **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** and heard a **Green Woodpecker**. We would enjoy good views of the latter at our next stop.

Driving beside the River Welland to Deeping Lakes nature reserve, we saw **Little Grebes** on the water. After parking up at the lakes, the first bird we saw – from the car park – was a **Bittern**, stood on the edge of the reeds across the water, glowing gold in the sun, a **Grey Heron** was just a few metres to its left. Whilst tucking into our packed lunches, we enjoyed views of **Stonechats**, **Fieldfare** and a **Reed Bunting** as well as a **Goldeneye**.



After enjoying the birds and the sunshine for a bit, we walked along the riverbank to find a **Little Owl** perched in a willow. Three **Glossy Ibis** flew overhead, dropping out of view before reappearing a little later. We walked on to the hide overlooking the main lake, spotting a **Kingfisher** along the way. As well as a male **Goldeneye**, we were treated to another close-up view of a **Long-eared Owl**, just a few metres from the hide.

On our way back to the hotel, we stopped along the Deeping High Bank to scan a large flock of swans. In the distance were two **Tundra Bean Geese**. Following an orange fenland sunset, we headed back, a **Barn Owl** flying beside the van for a few seconds.

Day checklist: 60 species



Day 4: Frampton Marsh RSPB

Our longest journey of the week was to Frampton Marsh RSPB. On arrival, we were greeted by another flock of several hundred **Lapwings**, above **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Starlings** and **Northern Pintail**. Walking across the reserve, the gurgle of several hundred flying **Brent Geese** filled the air. In the East Hide, we enjoyed views of multiple waders: **Redshank**, **Curlew**, **Ringed Plover**, **Dunlin**, **Grey Plover** and **European Golden Plover**.

Heading up on to the sea wall, we looked for the **Snow Bunting** flock reported on the BirdGuides app, enjoying fantastic views of seven birds. Passing an **Oystercatcher**, we followed the path back towards the visitor centre, stopping a while to scan groups of wildfowl. This produced **White-fronted Geese**, our seventh goose species of the week. Not far from the visitor centre, a **Peregrine Falcon** was spotted perched on the roof of a nearby barn. We drove back via the Deeping High Bank for dusk. There we watched two Marsh Harriers dancing together in the sky.

Day checklist: 55 species

Day 5: Ouse Washes RSPB

Our final morning saw a return to drizzly conditions. So the nearby Ouse Washes RSPB were ideal with two hides close to the car park. From the visitor centre, we watched a selection of garden birds flitting around and feeding: **Goldfinch, Blackbird, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit** and **Duncock**. A flock of **Long-tailed Tits** then moved through, accompanying which was a **Firecrest**, which landed briefly in the willow in front of us. We walked towards The Washes themselves, seeing a **Stock Dove** on the way. From the Welches Dam Hide, we watched **Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Gadwall, Mallard, Pochard** and **Lapwing**, seeing **Common Buzzard** and **Stonechat** on the walk back. Our return route passed a final field of **Whooper Swans** beside the road.

Day checklist: 41 species



SPECIES	DAY ONE	DAY TWO	DAY THREE	DAY FOUR	DAY FIVE
Greylag Goose	√	√	√	√	√
Greylag x Canada Goose		√	√		
Canada Goose			√	√	
Pink-footed Goose		√	√	√	
White-fronted Goose				√	
Bean Goose			√		
Brent Goose				√	
Egyptian Goose	√	√	√	√	√
Whooper Swan	√	√	√	√	√
Bewick's Swan			√		
Mute Swan	√	√	√	√	√
Common Shelduck		√		√	
Northern Shoveler		√	√	√	
Gadwall		√	√	√	√
Eurasian Wigeon		√	√	√	√
Mallard	√	√	√	√	√
Northern Pintail				√	
Euraisan Teal		√	√	√	√
Tufted Duck	√	√	√	√	√
Goldeneye			√		
Pochard		√	√		√
Goosander	√		√		
Pheasant	√	√		√	√
Red-legged Partridge				√	
Feral Pigeon					
Stock Dove	√				√
Common Woodpigeon	√		√	√	√
Collared Dove	√	√		√	√
Moorhen	√	√	√	√	√
Coot	√	√	√	√	√
Grey Plover				√	
European Golden Plover			√	√	
Ringed Plover				√	
Oystercatcher				√	
Curlew				√	
Black-tailed Godwit			√	√	
Northern Lapwing		√	√	√	√
Common Redshank				√	
Dunlin		√		√	
Black-headed Gull	√	√	√	√	√
Common Gull		√	√		
Herring Gull		√		√	√
Lesser Black-backed Gull		√			√

Great Black-backed Gull		√			
Great Crested Grebe	√			√	
Little Grebe			√	√	
Cormorant	√	√	√	√	√
Bittern			√		
Little Egret		√		√	
Great White Egret		√	√		
Cattle Egret		√			
Grey Heron		√	√	√	√
Glossy Ibis			√		
Common Crane		√	√		
Common Kestrel	√	√	√	√	√
Marsh Harrier		√	√	√	
Common Buzzard	√	√	√	√	√
Peregrine Falcon				√	
Red Kite		√		√	
Barn Owl			√		
Long-eared Owl			√		
Little Owl			√		
Kingfisher			√		
Great Spotted Woodpecker			√		√
Green Woodpecker			√		
Jay	√				
Magpie	√	√	√	√	√
Jackdaw	√	√	√	√	√
Rook	√		√	√	√
Carrion Crow	√	√	√	√	
Treecreeper	√		√		
Nuthatch	√				
Coal Tit	√				
Marsh Tit	√				
Blue Tit	√		√		√
Great Tit	√		√		√
Cetti's Warbler		√			
Goldcrest	√				
Firecrest					√
Wren		√	√		√
Long-tailed Tit	√		√		√
Starling		√		√	
Blackbird	√		√		√
Redwing	√		√	√	
Fieldfare			√	√	
Robin	√	√	√		√
Stonechat			√	√	√

Dunnock	√	√			√
House Sparrow		√			√
Tree Sparrow		√			
Pied Wagtail		√	√		√
Meadow Pipit		√		√	
Bullfinch		√			
Chaffinch	√		√		√
Greenfinch	√		√		
Siskin	√				
Common Linnet				√	
Goldfinch					√
Crossbill	√				
Reed Bunting		√	√	√	
Snow Bunting				√	

Trip total: 101 species