

Norfolk

Beefsteaks and Blewits

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

The Old Rectory, Crostwick

We will all meet up at The Old Rectory Hotel in Crostwick and settle in for our first delicious dinner.

Day 2

Smockmill Common and Wheatfen Reserve, Surlingham

Smockmill Common it might be said is where Greentours was born. The tour company started when we were living in a little hamlet some way south of Norwich and Smockmill Common was the go-to place for a local walk. A nice little patch of heath and mixed woodlands just a few hundred metres from our abode.

Grassy areas are strewn with Scarlet Hoods and Snowy Waxcaps, vivid against the turf. With them are yellow waxcaps, *Hygrocybe ceracea*, making a wonderful combination of colours. As we move into an area dominated by Turkish Oaks we might see Green Woodpecker, Nuthatch and Long-tailed Tits, but soon our attention will return to the fungi. Here are great circles of Clouded Agarics, presumably very old by the size of them. A variety of funnel caps include Tawny Funnel Cap, Common Funnel Cap and the Club Foot. Delicious lilac Wood Blewits are here and there and we'll see the Bolete *Boletus subtomentosus*. The first milkcap of the trip will likely be *Lactarius tabidus*, a rusty-coloured mushroom which 'bleeds' milk when the gills are cut. On dead wood are Artist's Fungus and lots of blackened and irregular Dead Man's Fingers. Rotting pieces of wood are stained bright green indicative of the mycelial infection of Green Wood Cup, and if we are lucky we may even find the little fruiting bodies. Architectural Shaggy Parasol mushrooms mark the beginning of another fungi rich spot which has Amethyst Deceivers, an impressive colony of the puffball *Lycoperdon pyriform*, and the unusual coconut-scented *Russula luteotacta*.

A beautiful avenue of ancient coppiced beeches hosts all sorts of fungi. There's the encrusting black lumps of Tripe Fungus *Auricularia mesenteria*, brackets of Giant *Griffola* and some outstanding examples of jelly-like Jew's Ears. There's also Clustered Tough-shanks, yellow blotches of *Dacrymyces stillatus* on decaying wood, and the Oyster Mushroom relative *Pleurotus pulmonarius*.

After lunch we'll head to the Ted Ellis Reserve at Surlingham, where's well explore both dry and wet woodlands for fungi. Here is the lovely Maze-Gill, the unusual greenish Aniseed Toadstool, and the real Oyster Mushroom *Pleurotus ostreatus*. We'll see Wood Blewits, fresh, bright Amethyst Deceivers, glowing Yellow Clubs and the

Beechwood Sickener – a red and sticky *Russula*. Indeed there will be a number of *Russulas* with brightly coloured caps (yellow, pink or purple and black) and white flesh, gills and stems. Here are *Russula albonigra*, *Russula nigricans* (Blackening *Russula*), and under the conifers *Russula erythropus*. In the evening we'll head to the Red Lion in Coltishall for a slap-up meal.

Day 3

Holt Lowes, Holkham Pines and Cley-next-the-Sea

The rolling country known as Holt Lowes, a mix of sandy heathlands, damp valleys with pools, and woodland, is a haven for many species of fungi. Flocks of Pink-footed Geese flying between their feeding grounds along the north Norfolk coast make Vs across the skies as we walk across the heath to a conifer plantation where there are colonies of bright orange False Chanterelles and where we'll see Stinkhorns at every stage from jelly 'egg' to wilted. Gorgeous Fly Agarics are everywhere and we'll see the related Blusher too. *Gymnopilus* is a diverse genus here with *Gymnopilus junonia* and *Gymnopilus penetrans* growing on rotting wood and *Gymnopilus hybridus* on soil. There's both Common Yellow *Russula* and Yellow Swamp *Russula* and more species of waxcap, the dark Herald of Winter which appears after the first frost, and bright yellow *Hygrocybe strangulata*. One of the UK's most photogenic fungi, the lovely Verdigris Agaric often appears here. In birchwoods around the pools we'll see Brown Roll-rims, Ugly Milk Caps, Yellow Swamp *Russulas* and Brown Birch Boletes. *Cortinarius* is a diverse genus in the UK and here we'll hope to see *Cortinarius alboviolaceus*. Two very photogenic species are the locally common Orange Birch Bolete and the strange misshapen *Boletus aereus*. Amongst fungal oddities at Holt Lowes are the furry, pink-edged bracket *Hirschioporus abietinus* and the Purple Jellydisc.

Nearby is Holkham Pines where we'll take a walk into the nearby sand dunes in a careful search for the nationally rare *Geastrum minimum* or Tiny Earthstar. As its name suggests a delicate little creature of great beauty and though it is indeed small it is easily spotted in the damp hollows where little else grows. These dune slacks are home to quite a few waxcaps, notably Snowy, Parrot and Dune Waxcap which comes in a variety of colours – yellows, reds and even purples. There's Snowy and Parrot Waxcaps too as well as delicate pale orange Spangle Waxcap. *Entelomas* are typical of the habitat and there's also the unusual *Tulostoma brumale* or Winter Stalkball, a rather weird and not particularly attractive fungus! Much nice will be the delicate little Field Bird's-nests, *Cyathus olla*, whose tiny but perfect little egg-filled 'nests' are not uncommon here.

We'll take lunch at The Bell in Wiveton. Outside, on the village green in front of the old church the turf has yet more bright wax caps, and, if they've not been picked, a few Magic Mushrooms or Liberty Caps, famous for their hallucinogenic qualities.

We'll spend the afternoon along the north coast at Salhouse and Cley. A long shingle ridge separates the North Sea from the coastal marshes here and a little

wandering along it will hopefully see us encountering the recently arrived Shorelarks which regularly winter there. Cley's reserve never fails to impress. The scrapes and reedbeds, dykes and shingle ridge, are home to a tremendous variety of birds. We'll take a walk round the reserve visiting some of the hides which will allow us close-up views a variety of wildfowl such as Wigeon, Teal, Gadwall, Pintail, Shelduck and Shoveler. There should still be some Avocets about and other waders are likely to include Dunlin, Ruff and Curlew. Brent Geese fly over occasionally and looking offshore we should see Common Eiders and both Razorbills and Guillemots. We might even get to see the uncommon *Entoloma porphyrophaeum*, a largish conical grey mushroom which is becoming scarce in pastureland as it can't abide fertiliser – a fate shared by many other pasture-growing species.

Day 4

Buxton Common and Departure

We'll spend the morning exploring Buxton Heath, an area of heathland in spring known for its orchids and slow worms, but in autumn rich in fungi. The mixture of heath, deciduous and conifer woods will prove a rich hunting ground and we expect to see good numbers of Wood Blewits and Parasol Mushrooms. There's also the little earthball *Scleroderma verrucosa*, Velvet Shank and Tawny Grisette, and we'll hope to spot the lovely little Bay Bolete, a very tasty species. Many of the gorse bushes sport the festive Yellow Brain Fungus. We'll see Peppery Bolete as well as slimy *Suillus variegatus* and the small pale pinky-orange *Suillus bovinus*. The heath is grazed by horses and growing on their dung is the Bell-shaped Mottlegill.

We'll head to the King's Head in Coltishall for a Sunday roast before saying our farewells and heading off home. Or on to the extension...

Norfolk Birding Extension

Day 4

To the north Coast via Hickling, Horsey and Winterton

After lunch we'll cross the northern part of the Broads National Park to the birding hotspots of Hickling and Horsey. These two wonderful, originally man-made, broads have over the years become the home of a wonderful array of wetland and damp grassland species. Many years ago this was the only place in the UK where you could regularly see Common Cranes. A small population established itself in the 1980s and since then they've gradually increased to around forty in number. Amazing how difficult though to spot forty large grey birds in an open landscape! But we'll check the best spots for them and we have a good chance to see them. The largest raptor roost in Britain sees several tens of Marsh Harriers and a few Hen Harriers cruising in during the evening to rest for the night as well as sometimes Short-eared Owls. Bitterns occasionally fly out over the reedbeds and there's wintering geese and wildfowl too.

We'll take a look at Wintertons dunes for late migrants and have a look at the Grey Seal colony there.

Day 5

Cley-next-the-Sea and Holkham Pines and Well's Woods

In the morning we'll check out Wells Woods for migrants. Early November is just past the peak time for eastern rarities here but is nonetheless a great time to bird the mix of conifers and birch woods back of Wells beach. Redstarts and Pied Flycatchers may still be moving through and if we've had any easterlies in the past day or two the tit flocks may contain something rarer, perhaps a Yellow-browed Warbler? We'll move over to Holkham Pines to see if we can connect with the Hawfinch flock there and we may also catch the first winter Bramblings too. After lunch in Cley we'll spend the afternoon enjoying the varied birding on offer at Cley Reserve. Bearded Tits and maybe Water Rails in the reedbeds, a rich range of wildfowl and waders on scrapes, feeding geese flocks on the grazing marshes and of course we'll have a look along the shingle ridge for migrants. Offshore are various seaduck and auks too, maybe a skua or Diver.... Red-throated Divers are quite common and other Diver species are possible as are various Grebes.

Day 6

Titchwell and Departure

In the morning we'll head a little further east to Titchwell. Titchwell came along much later than Cley as a bird reserve but soon gained a great reputation for being an especially good spot for Bitterns, Bearded Tits and Water Rails. Golden Plover will be moving in in numbers and on the sea are Long-tailed Duck and Goldeneye. Redwings and Fieldfares will be arriving in numbers and there can be small flocks of Bullfinches too, a beautiful sight.

We'll have a final pub lunch at the Briarfields before heading home.

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