

# Birding in North Wales

## A Private tour for Guildford RSPB

Naturetrek Tour Report

31 May - 5 June 2018



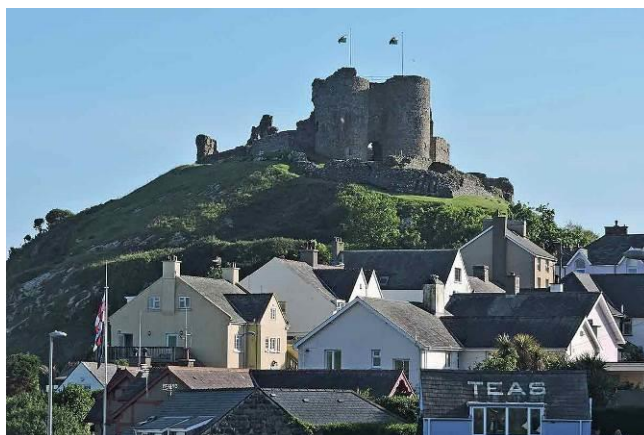
Red-billed Chough



Sandwich Tern



Pied Flycatcher



Criccieth Castle

Report compiled by Andrew Bray and Tom Mabbett  
Images courtesy of Peter Hambrook



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Tour participants: Andrew Bray and Tom Mabbett (leaders) with 10 clients

## Summary

This holiday, which was run especially for the Guildford RSPB group, was a great success. We spent a superb few days in North Wales enjoying a wonderful range of birds, special scenery and had a lot of fun long the way. The visit to Bardsey Island and the bird observatory was special, with wonderful close ups of the seabird colonies and noisy Grey Seals. Arctic, Common and Sandwich Terns nesting together, Choughs, Hen Harrier, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Ospreys and Red Squirrels were just some of the many highlights enjoyed while we were blessed with lovely weather and excellent hospitality, with our seafront hotel ideal for morning walks and sea watching.

### Day 1

Thursday 31st May

This morning Tom and Andrew collected the group from Guildford and Woking and, with no queues on motorways, we met at the services at Shrewsbury. After lunch it was off to RSPB Lake Vrnwy and time for some birding and a stretch of the legs. Here we walked about three miles on a circular walk over the ridge, with some long uphill and downhill. At the start we enjoyed a Pied Flycatcher and during the walk there was a Wood Warbler singing so near the track, but we could not locate it. In an open area we had excellent views of Tree Pipit. From the hide near the visitor centre there were Siskin and Nuthatch allowing close-up views; we also enjoyed Small Copper Butterflies and picked up some day flying moths and various plants. By the time we returned to the start the cafe was closing, but we enjoyed a cold drink and ice cream before travelling to the Lakeside Hide at the top end of lake where there were Great Crested Grebe and Tufted Duck. It was time now to head on and we drove to Bala across the mountains and then on to Criccieth, our base for the next five nights. We enjoyed our first delicious dinner and all turned in for some well-earned rest.

### Day 2

Friday 1st June

Today we were heading to the famous Bardsey Island and, despite a little rain, a walk along the beach produced Ringed Plover, Sanderling and a Rock Pipit as highlights. As we travelled to the island the rain fell; however, it had eased and the sky was brighter as we stopped at the bakery in Aberdaron to buy lunch where a Heron sat on the roof of the local Spar. By the time we reached the boat car park, the sun was out.

The boat was lifted by a trailer out of the water and we climbed aboard before being pushed back into the water to float away. Before launching, we enjoyed a lovely Fulmar sitting on its nest. Out to sea was a fog bank, so we headed for Bardsey, passing Guillemots, a few Puffins and some Manx Shearwaters on the way. On arrival, the skipper Colin gave us a passionate talk about the Island before we set off to the Bird Observatory where an assistant warden was showing a few moths including the impressive Buff-tip. We looked for the Greenish Warbler and the Marsh Warbler, but neither were heard or seen as we enjoyed walking around the island and taking it all in. The farm did tea and coffee and there were picnic benches to eat lunch on. The mist rolled down at times so visibility was down to well below 100 metres but at other times it looked to slightly clear. We found Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit and Shelduck by the sandy beach, with those who walked to the lighthouse seeing Whimbrel while Choughs fed close by and Wheatears were enjoyed. There were many Grey Seals by the slipway and these noisy animals were enjoyed. On the way back, the skipper followed the coastline slowly, so we had

really great views of auk colonies and Kittiwakes, with Shags seen close up and some Herring Gulls with chicks. Razorbills, Guillemots and Puffins were enjoyed at point blank just off the boat, and it was a wonderful experience. The fog bank on the way back was even greater but we did see Manx Shearwater close up. We then had a drive in the sun back to the hotel. We all met before dinner to run through the sightings from the last two days and plans for the next day, and enjoyed another really superb meal.

## Day 3

## Saturday 2nd June

It was cool for the morning bird walk with some light drizzle, but that didn't stop us and we walked into town. We soon unfortunately found a Starling trapped in a window of a seemingly empty house. We completed a short circular walk and, after a great breakfast, Tom and a few of the group knocked on the door and, to much surprise, the owner let Tom rescue the bird from this unused room. A good deed for the day! We now drove to RSPB Cors Ddyga on Anglesey, where conditions at the reserve were cool. It was like a mini Somerset Levels with pools for Lapwing and we saw a hunting Marsh Harrier. Sedge Warblers sang and we followed the straight path to the river with close views of Skylark, Little Egret and Grey Heron. From there, we then drove to South Stack which was covered in mist on our arrival. After lunch, thankfully, the mist had cleared, and the cliffs were alive with Auks; we even found a Puffin on the water and enjoyed this teeming seabird colony while a Chough was feeding nearby.

Leaving here we stopped in Holyhead harbour; at the second stop, as we were watching from the roadside, we found two smart Black Guillemot. We then moved on to the glorious Cemlyn Bay where we parked up by a shingle bar and walked out to see Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns all breeding together, providing some wonderful close-up views of all three species. There was even a smart Curlew Sandpiper which was well found in with some Dunlin here. We then made a brief stop at Porth Swtan, near a very popular beach, before retracing our steps and heading to Newborough. At Llyn Parc Mawr we found the Red Squirrels after a short walk. We enjoyed excellent, prolonged views of these special mammals and we all sat and took lots of photos of them as they visited some feeders. It was time to head back and, after a little while in a queue just past Caernarfon, we arrived at the hotel. On the way back the cloud was lifting off the mountains and we could see the impressive peaks. Again, we ran through the day's events and sightings before a lovely meal.

## Day 4

## Sunday 3rd June

We walked along the railway line today for the early morning bird walk, with the Sanderling and Ringed Plover on the beach as well as Sand Martin nesting in the bank and Swift in the hotel. After breakfast, we drove to Glaslyn Osprey Centre where two nests were visible from the centre. The bird on the closest nest eventually showed very well and we all enjoyed super views of this special bird while learning about them in this area. There were plenty of other birds, including Siskin, and Grey Wagtails and Common Sandpiper on the river. We then drove past Snowdon with a great view of this impressive mountain. We then travelled past the Glyders and turned off the A5 near Pont Pen-y-benglog. We stopped at various places along the narrow road and enjoyed a family party of Wheatear and a lovely male Redstart singing away. We won't mention the Cuckoo find! It was then onto the coast at Abergwyngregyn, where we added Curlew and a lone Bar-tailed Godwit to our ever-growing bird list, and with the sun shining, and we drove to RSPB Conwy. This small reserve was the result of the A55 tunnel under the Conwy Estuary. We had lunch here and picked up Coot and a Reed Warbler as it flew to and from reed patches, while at the Carneddau Hide a Red-breasted Merganser had just flown in and, during

our visit, we added various ducks to the list, including Gadwall and Pochard. Walking back, there were Long-tailed Tits and Greenfinch.

Our next visit was to Great Orme and we paid the toll and drove around this country park. At our final stop we added Chough to the auks and gulls seen along with the wonderful views. A Weasel crossed the road in front of us as we drove out of the park, allowing nice views, and it was then a drive back to the hotel in the sunshine. That evening we went out to look for owls and listened to Nightjar purring and a Tawny owl calling at the reserve of Gwaith Powdwr, nearby.

## Day 5

Monday 4th June

We had our early morning walk along the beach but did not get very far today, noting the usual suspects, and after breakfast, we stopped at Porthmadog to buy some lunch. Today we were heading for Ynys-hir RSPB, and our first stop of the day was at Tŷ'n-y-Groes for Dipper and Grey Wagtail. We had super views of an adult Dipper with a single young bird and we all had lovely views of this super bird. At the next stop near Dolgellau there were cows in the river, so few birds were seen apart from tits and Chaffinch in the woods.

It was then to RSPB Ynys-hir via Machynlleth, and we walked around the saltmarsh, woodland and wetland trails of this superb and varied reserve. We had excellent views of Pied Flycatcher, Stonechat, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper and, from a hide while enjoying lunch, we watched an Osprey along the river. There were lots of Canada Geese on the Estuary with one feral Bar-headed Goose, and Redshank and young Lapwings were enjoyed. Time flew by at this fantastic reserve where Springwatch had been filmed several years earlier. We had tea at the end on the benches by the visitor centre before heading back to our base. It was such a lovely evening that we did the brief and list outside tonight in the garden and enjoyed our last excellent meal.

## Day 6

Tuesday 5th June

Today was our last day and we did not get off the esplanade during the early morning walk, as there were many Gannet feeding just offshore; also, Manx Shearwater were visible with the naked eye, never mind through the optics. After breakfast, we loaded the minibuses and set off for Lake Vrnwy once more, to break our journey. We drove across the highest road in Wales in the cloud, and we eventually stopped near some buildings and the cloud lifted. We spent some time scanning here, with a Snipe found perched on a post, and there were plenty of Meadow Pipits. A Red Kite drifted over and by some buildings there was Grey Wagtail and Wheatear, with a Redstart also enjoyed. It was time to carry on down the hillside, but Tom's minibus heard, and then stopped to watch, a smart male Whinchat by the side of the road and were then rewarded with a stunning female Hen Harrier quartering over a hillside. It was a rather brief but special view of this enigmatic raptor. The first minibus was looking at a Spotted Flycatcher and also stopped at the hides at the top of Lake Vrnwy and saw a Peregrine. At the visitor centre the groups met up and one group saw a Pied Flycatcher visiting a nest box and there was plenty of Siskin on the feeders once more. It was time to head back to Woking and Guildford and we were soon all safely home after a great few days.

We recorded 122 species of bird including a few heard only: Tawny Owl, Nightjar, Wood Warbler and Cetti's Warbler. The weather was typically Welsh: sun, some rain and low cloud but including some gloriously sunny days. We ate well in the hotel and the rooms were very comfortable. We saw lots of butterflies as well and a few

plants that covered the coastline. We all had a very enjoyable visit and had a lot of fun and laughter along the way.

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Red Squirrel



Arctic Tern



## Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May / June					
			31	1	2	3	4	5
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	✓		
2	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓					✓
3	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓
4	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		✓		✓		✓
5	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓	✓			✓
6	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
7	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>		✓		✓		
8	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	✓	✓	
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
10	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓		✓	
12	Bar-headed Goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>	□		□	□	✓	
13	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	
14	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>				✓		
16	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>					✓	
17	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Northern Shoveler	<i>Mareca penelope</i>				✓	□	
19	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				✓	✓	
20	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓		
21	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓		✓			✓
22	Goosander (Common Merganser)	<i>Mergus merganser</i>				✓		
23	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>				✓		
24	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				✓	✓	
25	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓
26	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓			
27	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>						✓
28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓
30	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>						✓
31	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>						
33	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
34	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓		
35	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓	✓	✓	
38	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
39	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓				
40	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			✓			
42	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓		✓		
43	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					✓	
44	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓		✓		
45	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>				✓	✓	
46	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓				
47	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>						✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May / June					
			31	1	2	3	4	5
48	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓			
49	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		✓		✓	□	
53	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>			✓			
54	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>			✓			
55	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>			✓			
56	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓	✓			
57	Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>			✓			
58	Guillemot (Common Murre)	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓	✓		
59	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓	✓		
60	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓			✓	
61	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
63	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓		✓		
64	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				H		
65	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>				H		
66	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
67	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓				✓	✓
68	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
70	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
73	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓				✓	
75	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓				✓	✓
77	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>					✓	
78	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
79	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				✓		✓
82	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓		✓		✓
83	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>						✓
84	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>					✓	
85	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓				✓	
87	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
89	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
90	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		✓		✓	✓	
91	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			✓	✓	✓	
92	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓		
93	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H			
94	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	H					
96	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓				✓	
98	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	✓				✓	✓



	Common name	Scientific name	May / June					
			31	1	2	3	4	5
99	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓	✓	☐	☐	☐	✓
100	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓				✓	
102	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>						✓
104	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓		
105	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓		✓		✓	
106	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			✓		✓	
107	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓			✓	✓	
109	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>		✓	✓	✓		
111	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
112	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
113	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
114	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
115	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
116	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	Common Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		✓				
118	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
119	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓			✓		
120	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	✓			✓		✓
121	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓	✓			
122	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓

## Mammals

Weasel, *Mustela nivalis*

Red Squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*

European Rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Grey Seal, *Halichoerus grypus*

Grey Squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*

## Butterflies

Large White, *Pieris brassicae*

Green-veined White, *Pieris napi*

Brimstone, *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Holly Blue, *Celastrina argiolus*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*

Small White, *Pieris rapae*

Orange Tip, *Anthocharis cardamines*

Small Copper, *Lycaena phleas*

Common Blue, *Polyommatus icarus*

Peacock Butterfly, *Inachis io*

Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria tircis*

## Dragonflies

Large Red Damselfly, *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

4-Spotted Chaser, *Libellula quadrimaculata*

Azure Damselfly, *Coenagrion puella*

Broad-bodied Chaser, *Libellula depressa*

## Moths

Silver-ground Carpet, *Xanthorhoe montanata*

Latticed Heath, *Ciasmia clathrata clathrata*

Buff-tip, *Phalera bucephala*

Silver Y, *Autographa gamma*

Green Carpet, *Colostygia pectinataria*

Brown Silver-line, *Petrophora chlorosata*

Cinnabar Moth, *Tyria jacobaeae*