

Swallowtails in Norfolk

14 - 17 June 2019 Led by Patrick Barkham & Alice Hunter



Greenwings Wildlife Holidays

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Friday 14th June

Our devoted band of Swallowtail Seekers assembled at the Hotel Wroxham at 5pm on the Friday to be greeted with gloomy news: the forecast for the weekend looked decidedly shaky. Saturday was supposed to be cloudy with rain moving in later, while the best conditions were to be sun and cloud on Sunday morning, followed by more of the rain showers which had dogged us earlier in June. We went for a little walk out from the hotel along the River Bure before supper, which didn't reveal any butterflies but we heard Blackcaps and Willow Warblers and saw some nice riverside scenery beyond the boatyards and bustle of Wroxham. Marsh Valerian was found flowering beneath the railway bridge too.

Saturday 15th June

It was a dull start to the day when we reached Hickling national nature reserve shortly after 9.30am. This Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve in the Thurne, the river valley closest to the coast, is set beside the largest of the freshwater lakes created by Medieval peat diggings that make up the Broads. Several Painted Ladies were on the wing and Reed Warblers were singing from the reserve's generous reedbeds. Alice pointed out a Long-Jawed Orb-Weaver spider, an Azure damselfly and a Bagworm moth caterpillar, while while Jean and Paul photographed a collection of sawfly larvae curiously arranged round the edge of a Sallow leaf. Chris spotted a Hobby flying low over the distant woods and then, miraculously in the sky beyond, the blanket of grey started to break up. As we wandered into the reserve, it swiftly became a completely unforecast sunny day. It was also muggy and warm – perfect butterflying weather – and within minutes we had a Four-Spotted Chaser, a Norfolk Hawker dragonfly and then our first and second Swallowtails of the day.

The third Swallowtail arrived as we were settling into our boats for a two-hour electric boat tour of the waterways and hidden hides of Hickling. It was enormous! Its caterpillar must have fed extremely well on bounteous milk parsley during the heat of the summer of 2018.

Most of our group were able to get on Swallowtail, the wooden boat ably captained by Richard, a Norfolk Wildlife Trust volunteer and fine authority on the reserve. Sian and Neville identified the burst of song from a Cetti's Warbler hidden in the reeds. As we pottered across Hickling Broad we saw Painted Ladies flying in furiously from the coast but



little did we realise that a major invasion had occurred on the Friday, and we would see many, many more Painted Ladies. We saw Great Crested Grebe and a Red Admiral flying over the water and four more Swallowtails.



We climbed the (secret) lookout tower in Waggon Hill plantation which provided a panoramic view of Hickling and the living landscape beyond out to the fragile dunes of the east Norfolk coast. From here we could admire the largest reed bed in England, and see some of the Marsh Harriers (nationally rarer than the Golden Eagle) it supports. Martin spotted two Little

Egrets from the tower, and the Painted Lady count just kept rising. By now we were in the 40s, with Painted Ladies constantly, steadily, flying past, in from the coast. On the path back to the broad, Fen Mason Wasps were admired by the group in the other boat as they built their delicate mud chimneys marking the entrance to their brood chambers.

Just beyond the lookout tower, Heather found a thick-legged flower beetle on a dog-rose and she then got some photographs of a Swallowtail nectaring on Red Campion, which we all enjoyed – a classic Broadland sight.

We got back in the boat and took a narrow channel to Rush Hill hide. This channel turned out to be Swallowtail heaven. The



butterflies kept flying over and inspecting us, and Duncan smartly spotted a Swallowtail egg from the boat. He found it on Milk Parsley growing on the warm south-facing side of reed bed right next to the channel – the Swallowtail females like to lay eggs on prominent plants in warm places close to water.

There was a midsummer peace over the pool beyond Rush Hills hide, with not many birds stirring except for a pair of Shelduck with six chicks (it had been 14 a few days earlier, so

the Marsh Harriers must be dining well). Those in Alice's boat also had good views of a

Chinese Water Deer grazing on the far shore here. On to Swim Coots, another hide which is only accessible via boat (and this particular boat trip), and we enjoyed fine views of a flock of 98 Black-Tailed Godwit, an attractive wading bird with an almost pinky salmon-coloured breast. We saw a Red Deer wander past the scrape, and had fabulous views of a low-flying Marsh Harrier.



Richard explained that the yellow flush on the far side of the scrape was Yellow Button-Weed, a non-native plant probably brought from the USA by the numerous geese that walk up and down the edges of these pools.



By now we had clocked up our 26th and 27th Swallowtail of the day – a record for these weekends. Clearly being pessimistic about the weather paid off! In the other boat, Alice and her guests saw and heard plenty of Bearded Tits.

On the walk back through the reserve we saw a hornet on an oak tree, Small Tortoiseshell on bramble and our Painted Lady count rose to 70, and then 80 and reached 108 by the time we sat and ate our sandwiches in the meadow outside Hickling visitor centre. We also enjoyed four more Swallowtail sightings to make it a record 31 for the day.

We drove from Hickling to How Hill for the afternoon, another national nature reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest which is situated in the grounds of a lovely arts and crafts thatched house set on a low hill above the River Ant. This less well-known nature reserve is run by an educational



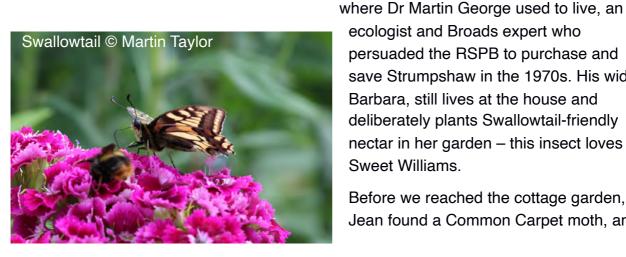
charity, and there is a lovely little folk museum in an old "marsh man's" cottage set by the river. Beyond is a sheltered meadow which is a great spot for seeing nectaring Swallowtails. Unfortunately the sun had gone behind a cloud by this point and although Paul spied a Common Blue and we also found two Large Skippers and plenty more Painted Ladies, the Swallowtails were not on the wing. We went on a slow wildlife walk around How Hill, which is a much more sheltered and intimately wooded reserve than Hickling. Martin spotted a Hobby, and Alice identified several Reed Beetles, a Large Red Damselfly, a Zebra Jumping Spider and also gave us all a crash course in blue damselfly identification, with dozens in flight: Common Blue, Variable, Azure and Blue-Tailed. By one hide, we pulled at a 20cm-long stick stuck in the mud: the stick kept coming up and up until

it reached 4 metres high – a neat and dramatic illustration of the muddy depths of the Broads. How Hill is a good site for the impressive Royal Fern, and other plants including delicate Water Violet. We heard a distant Cuckoo and enjoyed finding the beautiful Longhorned micro-moth and the Straw Dot moth. No Swallowtails showed at How Hill but after 31 at Hickling we were more than satisfied. We also clocked up 154 Painted Ladies for the day.



Sunday 16th June

If Saturday was a day of quantity then Sunday delivered quality, in terms of fine views of Swallowtails. It dawned bright and sunny but was already clouding over when we left the hotel on the dot of nine to drive 25 minutes to Strumpshaw Fen. We saw more Painted Ladies on the drive and soon clocked a Speckled Wood and a Red Admiral in the woods beside the RSPB reserve. Rather than plunge straight into the reserve, we took the track along the northern border of the reserve to the "doctor's house". This is the old cottage



ecologist and Broads expert who persuaded the RSPB to purchase and save Strumpshaw in the 1970s. His widow, Barbara, still lives at the house and deliberately plants Swallowtail-friendly nectar in her garden – this insect loves Sweet Williams.

Before we reached the cottage garden, Jean found a Common Carpet moth, and we also saw a Golden Bloomed Grey Longhorn beetle. My children joined us for the first hour and Esme ran ahead to the garden and was soon shouting "Swallowtail!" Sure enough, one was nectaring on the Sweet Williams outside Barbara George's house (and we met Barbara too, who was doing some gardening). We saw another two Swallowtails here, and most of the group got some photographs of them nectaring before they disappeared. The Strumpshaw Swallowtails seem to come to the garden and reserve edge in the mornings to take nectar, fuelling up before dispersing across the reedbeds and the Yare Valley later in the day – we later met several keen naturalists who had arrived at Strumpshaw after 11am and hadn't seen a single Swallowtail.

We moved on to the rough field edge which has been "set aside". On the slope of the Yare Valley, this field is full of hawk's bit and other floral "weeds" and is enjoyed by the Swallowtails. Here we saw good numbers of Meadow Browns and Common Blues and Mullein Moth caterpillars on Mullein, funnily enough. Our Painted Lady count was now in the thirties, and there



were probably 100 of these migrants in this one small field. We also saw a Southern Hawker.

We then crossed the railway line and made a slow circumnavigation of this big reserve. We saw lots of Common Lizards up close, and enjoyed seeing Peacocks, Red Admirals, Painted Ladies and a female Black-Tailed Skimmer and a female Scarce Chaser – two very handsome dragonflies. Nicky spotted Grey Herons and Carol found a pair of Hogweed Bonking Beetles doing exactly what their name suggests. On a corner of the path where several Red Admirals were spotted making the most of a sap run in a Sallow, a



Swallowtail gave us particularly good and close views as it came in to nectar on a bramble patch for several minutes, flitting methodically from flower to flower. Elsewhere, Duncan found a Nursery Web Spider while Chris found Gadwall at Strumpshaw's Tower Hide. There were also plentiful Banded Demoiselles.

The cloud had come in, as the forecast had warned, and our picnic lunch was cut short by a pretty heavy summer rain shower. So we climbed in our two minibuses and drove on, eastwards along the Yare Valley before cutting up the Ant Valley to Sutton Fen. Ian Robinson, the RSPB regional manager for the Broads, had kindly agreed to give us a personal guided tour of this secret nature reserve – so secret that I had no idea it existed until shortly before this year's Swallowtail weekends.

Sutton Fen is down a twisty dead-end lane, beyond a derelict farm, and feels like the middle of nowhere. This place has a special atmosphere – big skies, and a big kind of peace settling over everything, with no signs of human habitation, life or traffic anywhere.

The reserve was bought by the RSPB for £1.55 million from a local landowner in 2006 but, unusually, it is not open to the public and not really publicised at all. Unusually for an RSPB reserve, it is not managed for birds but for its flora and invertebrates.

"It's only the best bit of fen in Western Europe," said Ian of this hidden corner of the Norfolk Broads. The reserve had 350 Fen Orchid spikes when the RSPB purchased it; today, after some robust management – cutting down the alder carr woodland that was swamping the open reed and sedge beds – it has more than 7,000. Even so, it was still a pretty good place for birds. Carol found a Kestrel, and we all enjoyed seeing the Highland Cattle that are grazing the fen. Ian began by showing the us the least impressive part of the fen, and it still contained lovely rare plants such as the beautiful golden flowers of Greater Spearwort, masses of Marsh Fern and Tubular Water Dropwort.

We weren't expecting
Swallowtails but our sixth of the
day was a high-speed, windassisted flyby. Then, our
seventh Swallowtail swooped in
to nectar on a Marsh Thistle
right beside us. It is nice to
photograph a spectacular
Swallowtail on Sweet Williams
but it is really special to see one
and photograph it in its "natural"
setting, on a wild thistle,
surrounded by reedbeds. We
saw so many Black-Tailed
Skimmers, and Norfolk



Hawkers, with their spectacular emerald-green eyes, that it was hardly surprising when Chris spotted a Hobby hunting. Helen found a Great Diving Beetle and Heather revealed to us that it was female because it had ridges on its back (so the male could cling on to it when required). Nicky saw the eighth Swallowtail of the day crossing the rough pasture to lan's favourite bit of the reserve.

He took us onto what is known as "hover" – floating mats of vegetation below which was three metres of extremely deep mud and water. Here the fen is quite "new", having formed over what used to be Sutton Broad during the last 100 years. This was once open water, and now it is a unique marshland. We stood and bounced on the fen, and the vegetation rippled as if we were jumping on a water bed. "It's like seeing an ecosystem, seeing how all the plants are connected," observed Martin.



On this extraordinary floating fen, we found Fen Orchid growing in "families". In less than a



square metre, Ian could point out Red Data Book plant species including Fibrous Tussock Sedge, Tubular Water Dropwort and Milk Parsley. Ian also showed us Buckler Fern, which is apparently so rare it makes the Fen Orchid look like a common plant. As we were admiring what I must admit looked a fairly standard marshland fern, we heard a Cuckoo very close. Wordsworth wrote of its "wandering voice"

and I couldn't see it but Chris used his birding skills to track it down, perched high in a nearby poplar. It was lovely to see the Cuckoo on what was probably its last weekend in the Broads before beginning its long flight back to sub-Saharan Africa.



We were met with a wonderful double rainbow on returning to where we'd parked and finished the day with our 74th Painted Lady of the day, making a total of 228 for the weekend. Our weekend haul of 39 Swallowtail sightings was the best total yet after four of these Greenwings weekends. I wouldn't say we are getting better, but we seem to be getting luckier!



Monday 17th June

Our final morning was a little cooler than the previous day but we ventured out to Patrick's garden to see whether the moth trap we had set overnight had been successful. We began well with an attractive Small Magpie and Bloodvein. There were a large number of Heart and Dart, 43 in total! A few of our group had trains to catch and so they bid us farewell



while the others continued emptying the moth trap. The overall outcome was a total of around ninety moths comprising twenty seven or so species. Having enjoyed a cuppa and a scone alongside our mothing, we had a brief look at the Brimstone caterpillars in the garden before heading back to the Wroxham Hotel to part ways.

Norfolk Swallowtail Weekend 2019 species checklist			Friday 14th June	Saturday 15th June	Sunday 16th June	Monday 17th June
	Butterflies		day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4
	Apollos and Swallowtails	Family Papilionidae				
1	Swallowtail	Papilio machaon britannicus		✓ x 31	✓ x8	
	Whites and Yellows	Family Pieridae				
	Large White	Pieris brassicae		✓	✓	
	Small White	Pieris rapae		✓	✓	
	Green-veined White	Pieris napi			✓	
	Brimstone	Gonepteryx rhamni		✓	✓	Caterpillar
	Blues, Coppers and Hairstreaks	Family Lycaenidae				
	Small Copper	Lycaena phlaeas			✓	
	Common Blue	Polyommatus icarus		✓	✓	
	Aristocrats and Browns	Family Nymphalidae				
	Peacock	Inachis io		✓	✓	
	Small Tortoiseshell	Aglais urticae		✓	✓	
	Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta		✓	✓	
	Painted Lady	Vanessa cardui		✓ x 154	✓ x 74	
	Comma	Polygonia c-album			✓	
	Meadow Brown	Maniola jurtina		✓	✓	
	Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria			✓	
	Skippers	Family Hesperiidae				
	Large Skipper	Ochlodes venatus		✓		

	Norfolk Swallov 2019 specie		Saturday 15th June	Sunday 16th June	Monday 17th June
Moths			day 2	day 3	day 4
	Six-Spot Burnet	Zygaena filipendulae		✓	
	Blood-vein	Timandra comae			✓
3	Common Carpet	Epirrhoe alternata		✓	
5	Spinach	Eulithis mellinata			✓
	Mottled Pug	Eupithecia exiguata			✓
6	Green Pug	Pasiphila rectangulata			✓

Norfolk Swallowtail Weekend Saturday Sunday Monday 15th June 16th June 17th June 2019 species checklist					
	Moths			day 3	day 4
7	Willow Beauty	Peribatodes rhomboidaria			√ x 2
	Mottled Beauty	Alcis repandata			√
8	Clouded Silver	Lomographa temerata			√
13	Cinnabar	Tyria jacobaeae		✓	
14	Turnip	Agrotis segetum			✓ x 4
15	Heart and Dart	Agrotis exclamationis			✓ x 43
	The Flame	Axylia putrid			✓
16	Large Yellow Underwing	Noctua comes			✓
	Setaceous Hebrew Character	Xestia c-nigrum			✓ x 4
	Bright-line Brown-eye	Lacanobia oleracea			✓
17	Common Wainscot	Mythimna pollens			✓
18	Mullein	Shargacucullia verbasci		Caterpillar	
19	Dark Arches	Apamea monoglypha			✓ x 4
20	Marbled Minor	Oligia strigils			✓ x 4
21	Treble Lines	Charanyca trigrammica			✓
22	Vines Rustic	Hoplodrina ambigua			√ x 3
	Mottled Rustic	Caradrina morpheus			√ x 2
23	Silver Y	Autographa gramma		✓	
	Straw Dot	Rivula sericealis		✓	
24	Yellow Banded Longhorn	Nemophora degeerella	1	✓	
	Diamond-back	Plutella xylostella			✓ x 4
26	Plum Tortrix	Hedya pruniana			✓
	Bee Moth	Aphomia sociella			✓
		Ephestia unicolorella woodiella			√
29	Garden pebble	Evergestis forficalis			√ x 2
	Small Magpie	Anania hortulata			√ x 2
30		Udea olivalis			√ x 3

	Norfolk Swallo 2019 speci	Friday 14th June	Saturday 15th June	Sunday 16th June	Monday 17th June	
	Dragonflies and Damselflies			day 2	day 3	day 4
1	Banded Demoiselle	Calopteryx splendens			✓	
2	Large Red Damselfly	Pyrrhosoma nymphula		✓		
3	Azure Damselfly	Coenagrion puella		✓	✓	
4	Variable Damselfly	Coenagrion pulchellum		✓	✓	
5	Common Blue Damselfly	Enallagma cyathigerum		✓	✓	
	Hairy Dragonfly	Brachytron pratense			✓	
7	Southern Hawker	Aeshna cyanea			✓	
8	Norfolk Hawker	Anaciaeschna isosceles		✓	✓	
10	Scarce Chaser	Libellula fulva			✓	
11	Four - Spotted Chaser	Libellula quadrimaculata		1		
12	Black Tailed Skimmer	Orthetrum cancellatum			✓	

Other Notable Invertebrates

Fen Mason Wasp Odynerus simillimus

Hornet Vespa crabro

Thick-Legged Flower Beetle Oedemera nobilis

Red-Headed Cardinal Beetle Pyrochroa serraticornis

Hogweed Bonking Beetle Rhagonycha fulva

Golden-Bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle Agapanthia villosoviridescens

Great Diving Beetle Dysticua marginalis

Nursery Web Spider Pisaura mirabilis

Zebra Jumping Spider Salticus scenicus

	Norfolk Swallowtail Weekend 2019 species checklist		Friday 14th June	Saturday 15th June	Sunday 16th June	Monday 17th June
	Birds		day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4
1	Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	√	✓		
2	Greylag Goose	Anser anser		✓	✓	
3	Canada goose	Branta canadensis		✓	✓	
4	Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna		✓	✓	
5	Egyptian Goose	Alopochen aegyptiaca		✓		
6	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	✓		✓	
7	Gadwall	Anas strepera			✓	
8	Shoveler	Anas clypeata		✓		
9	Teal	Anas crecca		✓		
10	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus		✓		
12	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta		✓		
13	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea		✓		
14	Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus		✓	✓	
15	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo		✓		
16	Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus			✓	
17	Hobby	Falco subbuteo		✓	✓	
18	Coot	Fulica atra		✓		
19	Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta		✓		
20	Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus		✓		
21	Black-Tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa		✓	✓	
22	Black-Headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus		✓		
23	Common Gull	Larus canus		✓		
24	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo		✓	✓	
25	Stock Dove	Columba ones		✓		
26	Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus		✓	✓	
27	Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto		✓	✓	
28	Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus		J	✓	
29	Swift	Apus apus		✓	✓	
30	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia		✓		
31	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica		✓	✓	
32	House Martin	Delichon urbicum		✓	✓	
33	Pied Wagtail	Motacilla alba		√		

	Norfolk Swallowtail Weekend 2019 species checklist			Saturday 15th June	Sunday 16th June	Monday 17th June
	ı	Birds	day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4
34	Robin	Erithacus rubecula		✓		
35	Blackbird	Turdus merula		✓		
36	Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	П			
37	Sedge Warbler	Acrocephalus schoenobaenus		✓	✓	
38	Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti		J		
39	Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus		✓	✓	
40	Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus	IJ			
41	Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita		✓		
42	Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes		✓		
43	Bearded Tlt/Reedling	Panurus biarmicus		✓		
44	Jackdaw	Corvus monedula		✓		
45	Rook	Corvus frugilegus		✓		
46	Carrion Crow	Corvus corone			✓	
47	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus		✓	✓	
48	Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs		✓		
49	Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis		✓		
50	Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus		✓	✓	

Notable Plants

Bulrush Scirpus lacustris
Common Reed Phragmites australis
Fibrous Tussock Sedge Carex appropinquata
Greater Reedmace Typha latifolia
Lesser Reedmace Typha angustifolia
Pendulous Sedge Carex pendula
Saw Sedge Gahnia aspera

Crested Buckler Fern Dryopteris cristata Marsh Fern Thelypteris palustris Royal Fern Osmunda regalis

Bogbean (sadly not in flower) Menyanthes trifoliata

Bog Myrtle Myrica gale

Climbing Corydalis Ceratocapnos claviculata

Common Poppy Papaver rhoeas

Early Marsh Orchid (including all white var. leucantha) Dactylorhiza incarnata

Fen Orchid Lyparis loesslii

Great or Giant Water Dock Rumex hydrolapathum

Greater Spearwort Ranunculus lingua

Greater Water Parsnip Sium latifolium

Hemlock Conium maculatum

Lesser Spearwort Ranunculus flammula

Marsh Cinquefoil Comarum palustre

Marsh Lousewort Pedicularis palustris

Marsh Pea Lathyrus palustris

Marsh Skullcap Scutellaria galericulata

Marsh Stitchwort Stellaria palustris

Marsh Thistle Cirsium palustre

Marsh Valerian Valeriana dioica

Meadow thistle Cirsium dissectum

Milk Parsley Peucedanum palustre

Ragged Robin Lychnis flos-cuculi

Southern Marsh Orchid Dactylorhiza praetermissa

Tubular Water Dropwort Oenanthe fistulosa

Water Mint Mentha aquatica

White Water-Crowfoot Ranunculus aquatilis

White Water Lily Nymphaea alba

Yellow Flag Iris Iris pseudacorus

Yellow Water Lily Nuphar lutea





























