

COPY FOR JUST REGIONAL

## Winter birding highlights in North Norfolk

**Richard Spowage, Reserve Manager at Pensthorpe Natural Park in Fakenham, explains why North Norfolk is so magnetic for migratory birds and which species to look out for this Winter:-**

In many ways North Norfolk in winter is like one enormous arrivals and departures lounge seeing off the last of the summer migrants preparing to depart our shores while a new group of birds are returning for the impending winter.

The area of coastline boasts extensive areas of sand and shingle beaches, saltmarshes, reedbeds, lagoons, rivers and open water, making it a leading stretch of coastline in the UK for birdwatching. Similarly, inland areas of mixed wetland, countryside and woodland habitats like that at Pensthorpe Natural Park, prove to be an irresistible haven for birds looking for a safe place to feed and roost over winter.

Among the regular wintering birds are hundreds of thousands of wildfowl and waders escaping colder northern climes to feed on the Wash and its surrounding areas.

Geese are some of the most prolific of the returnees, in particular the Pink-footed Geese, which arrive back in vast flocks largely from Iceland to feed on arable farmland and the coastal grazing marshes, or Dark-bellied Brent Geese, which return from Siberia to feed on the marshes and tidal areas throughout the winter.

However, numbers-wise it's the waders who steal the show, with tens of thousands of birds arriving to feast amongst the coastal muds of the wash. Expect to see Oystercatcher, Dunlin and Red Knot over the coming months, many of which can easily be spotted in North Norfolk.

Travel slightly inland and you can expect to see foraging thrush such as Fieldfare, often turning up in large groups, and Redwing, the UK's smallest true thrush. They enjoy eating berries in our hedgerows but rarely visit domestic gardens except in the coldest weather.

Starling numbers grow as great flocks or murmerations appear in the evening skies, swelled by continental birds from Northern Europe escaping hard winters.

Look a little closer and there are secret migrations going on alongside the more obvious ones. In winter, Robins and Blackbirds arrive from northern Europe disappearing into our countryside almost unseen, whilst some of our own summer Robins begin their own migration south to places like southern France, Spain and Portugal.

For other species migration isn't a foregone conclusion; some birds arrive in North Norfolk only in certain circumstances. Waxwing are seen in significant numbers only if the Scandinavian winter forces the move, as is true for Bitterns arriving from continental Europe in late winter.

But it's not only the coast that attracts some of the most impressive species at this time of year. Pensthorpe Natural Park boasts a unique range of diverse habitats which many coastal stretches cannot offer, including wetlands, woodlands, rivers, farmland and gardens. Being just over ten miles from the coastline, but with such an abundant array of natural environments, it presents an appealing inland option for many birds and numbers swell accordingly. The popular wader scrape is bustling with winter wildfowl such as Wigeon and Teal, whilst winter thrushes populate the woodland and farmland. The reedbeds regularly offer sanctuary to both Water Rails and Bittern, whilst the feeding station outside the Woodland Hide can attract pretty species such as Siskin and Brambling which take advantage of the important free food source during the winter and particularly in cold snaps.

So to make the most of the stunning array of wintering birds we are lucky to enjoy in this region be sure to embrace the crisp weather, grab the binoculars and immerse yourself in the array of diverse habitats that harbour such spectacular birds throughout this abundant period.

For more information about Pensthorpe visit [pensthorpe.com](http://pensthorpe.com) or call 01328 851465.

-ends-

### **Editors Notes**

[Pensthorpe Natural Park](#) (PNP) is a 700-acre modern nature reserve. It is situated 11 miles inland from the north Norfolk coast, just outside Fakenham, and has the beautiful River Wensum winding through it.

PNP comprises wetlands, farmland, ancient woodlands, gardens, outdoor/indoor play and one of the largest wildflower meadows in Norfolk. It is home to thousands of bird, plant and wildlife species.

Pensthorpe Natural Park is on the A1067, one mile from Fakenham and just over 20 miles from the city of Norwich. Open all year (closed Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day):-

1st January – 28th February, 10am – 4pm

1st March – 24th July, 10am – 5pm

25th July – 5th September, 10am – 6pm

6th September – 31st December, 10am – 5pm

Entry prices: Adults £11.95, Seniors £10.95, Children £10.95, Under 3's free. Annual Members are free. Parking is free.

Online booking discount of £1 per person applies to tickets booked in advance.

**For more information, images or press passes please contact Rachael Shakespeare on [rachael@rs-pr.co.uk](mailto:rachael@rs-pr.co.uk) or 07833 940 000.**