

Going wild

Emma Lusby enjoys a wild and wonderful day out on the Yorkshire coast

Dawn breaks over the Yorkshire coast on a very cold November day as a small intrepid group gathers together at Seamer station in Scarborough. Anticipation is mounting for a day of bird and wildlife watching and we've been up early to make the most of the light. The forecast is clear and the sun begins to burn off the mist and frost.

Our guides for the day are Richard Baines and environmental education expert Margaret Boyd. Richard set up the

“It’s a real thrill to introduce people to wildlife, I never tire of it.”

Yorkshire Coast Nature tour company with wildlife photographer Steve Race six years ago and usually decides the exact tour route and locations on the morning of the trips.

Scanning birdwatching websites, messages from the birding network and with expert local knowledge, he can run a tour in response to the very latest sightings news and weather conditions. I've known Richard for more than years and the man is a birdwatching, nature-loving marvel with a passion for sharing his vast knowledge with others.

“It’s a real thrill and exciting to introduce people to wildlife, I never tire of it.” Richard adds. “East and North Yorkshire



have diverse, wide open landscapes and wonderful wildlife – from whales, otters and puffins to rare orchids and tiny migrant birds visiting from Siberia. These are also quieter areas with sparse populations, less well known than other locations in the UK so there’s undiscovered country to explore here.”

Throughout the day Richard also hears and identifies bird calls that most of us hadn’t even noticed. In his native north-east accent, he explains that birds have their own regional dialects too – we should



Flamborough by Bill Richards

start listening to wrens and compare them if we're in other parts of the UK.

Today, our tour will navigate the coastline of Flamborough Headland – from Bempton, Flamborough and then to Filey. We are full of lively chat and comparing notes on the birds we hope to see. For me, it's the brambling – an orange and brown chaffinch type of bird which flutters around treetops, hangs out in a flock and feeds on woodland floors

through winter. The tour, which includes a thirteen-year-old boy and his dad from Middlesbrough, is a mix of people with varying degrees of wildlife knowledge but we are all enthusiastic. "There's no such things as a silly question today," says Richard, who's keen to make the tours as fun, inclusive and relaxed as possible. There's a sigh of collective relief in the group.

First stop is RSPB's Bempton Cliffs, where between May and August, thousands of seabirds including puffins



A father and son with wildlife guide Richard Baines by Emma Lusby

and guillemots cram on to the towering chalk cliffs to raise their young. It's also one of the first places that migrating birds land and Richard explains that most of the birds we see today, including blackbirds and robins, will have arrived from

“It’s a real thrill to introduce people to wildlife, I never tire of it.”

mainland Europe in search of more food in a milder winter. We explore the trail, looking for a reported barred warbler and spot redwing instead before we head down the headland to Flamborough Lighthouse to do a spot of sea watching.

Here, the North Sea lies calm and vast ahead of us and Margaret and Richard fix up tripods to get a better look in on some of the birds that are out there. Seals

and porpoise are spotted too. We follow red-throated divers, common scoters and northern gannets as rock pipits and skylarks flutter overhead.

Nearby is Yorkshire Wildlife Trust’s Living Seas Centre and we explore the ravine and grounds around this friendly and welcoming centre which runs family activities throughout the year. Here we spot the highlights of the day – Siberian lesser whitethroat and Siberian chiffchaff and Richard talks about how the birds are identified. He’s also impressed that we’ve managed to spot these pretty birds in the dense foliage. I also get my glimpse of brambling in the top of a sycamore and we’re all smiles.

The East Riding is rapidly becoming known as one of the best places in the UK to watch wildlife and it is hoped nature tourism will bring the area a much needed



A pair of brightly coloured puffins at Bempton Cliffs by Ray Hennessy



Early marsh orchid by Richard Baines

economic boost, not just in the summer months when families flock to popular resorts of Bridlington, Scarborough and Hornsea, but throughout the year. The Yorkshire Nature Triangle was set up by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, with Coastal Communities funding to promote wildlife watching opportunities and is encouraging people to make the most of wild day, week or weekend whatever the weather. Recent analysis by Leeds Beckett University shows that it's beginning to pay off as the annual value of visits on the regional economy - by people wanting to watch and enjoy wildlife and the outdoors - has more than doubled in the last eight years to £24 million.

The day concludes with a trip to Filey. The beach is busy with families rockpooling, fossil hunting and meandering; enjoying the last day of half term. Spotting purple



sandpipers and oystercatchers, we scramble up and onto the Brigg – or Carr Naze as it’s known among birders and walkers. Then excitement! Richard gets a message that a white-tailed sea eagle, which had been spotted at Spurn earlier that morning has just been seen at Flamborough, on the other side of the bay.

“It’s keeping the mystery alive for another day”

We are in prime position as the sun starts to set, telescopes scanning the far side of the bay looking for a glimpse of a bird known as the flying barn door. It’s getting colder now and we grow quieter in anticipation that any minute someone will spot the hulking great shape. But then we learn the bird – which likely went off course on migration across northern Europe – has gone into roost near Flamborough.

A minke whale off the Yorkshire coast by Richard Baines

“It’s keeping the mystery alive for another day,” says Richard smiling as he compares notes with other birders who have also gathered nearby in the hope of seeing the visitor. Tired and windblown but buzzing with the sights and all we’ve learnt today, we make our way back to the vehicles.

Yorkshire Coast Nature runs a highly varied program of tours and photography workshops from day trips to short break holidays in four-star accommodation. Day trips focus on birding and wildlife safaris to whale and dolphin watching and two trips in the winter months to northern India. But the Yorkshire Trips are their most popular, with people making repeat visits to join one of the tours. It’s been an incredible, memorable and very happy day. 🐋