

Norfolk Records Committee Description Submission Form

Species: White-spotted Bluethroat	
Date/time first seen: May 31 st 2018 (1730)	Date/time last seen: June 4 th 2018
No. of Birds: 1	Age/Sex: Adult male
Location: Kelling Water Meadow	
Finder: Mark Golley (MAG)	
Identifier (<i>if different</i>): As above	Email:
Submitter (<i>if different</i>): As above	Email:
Other observers: Many	
Any who disagrees with identification? No	
Optical aids: Swarovski 8 x 32 bins	
Distance from bird: 60 yards to much more than that.	
Have you attached photographs? Yes	Was the bird videoed? Don't know
If photos are available on websites then please give address: Three of the attached appear on http://www.cleybirdclub.org.uk/cbc/default.asp	
Have the photographs been published in magazines? If so, where:	
Species present for comparison: Reed Bunting, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler	
Which species were alongside the bird: As above	
Observer(s) experience of the species: This bird is the third male White-spot that I've seen in the Cley square (one in the cattle pen near the beach road some 15 years ago, more maybe) and the singing male of June 2013 and now this bird. Also there was the apparently entirely blue-throated white-spot male, a "wolfi" type, in the reedbeds some 20 years ago (a March bird). I also saw a March White-spot at Lowestoft several years ago as well as wintering birds in Morocco and breeding birds in Europe.	
Observer(s) experience of similar species on the same day or previously: Many migrant Red-spotted Bluethroats seen over the years, especially spring birds during the 80's and early 90's, with fewer in Norfolk latterly (I last found a Norfolk bird, on Blakeney Point, in May 2007). Autumn birds seen and found on Fair Isle and, a week before finding this White-spotted male, I found a female Bluethroat, also on Fair Isle, around the croft at the Springfield.	
Weather : Overcast, slightly muggy afternoon. High cloud cover, clearing to weak sunny spells	
Wind direction and Force: Light NE	
Light conditions (<i>good, dull, etc & sun behind, side etc</i>): After a dull start, brightening by late afternoon.	
Visibility (<i>distance</i>): Excellent	
Address of submitter:	
Phone No:	
And finally, is the record 100% certain? Yes	

In your description please include the following:

1. Circumstances of finding the bird (if applicable) but keep it brief
2. Plumage, bare parts etc and call (if possible)
3. Jizz (that 'indefinable something' about the way it behaved)

Description: Having spent a very satisfying and very enjoyable week on Fair Isle, with a super array of classic late May hoped-for migrants, I was chomping at the bit to get back to Norfolk and have a go at all the marginal coastal areas of habitat that I've birded for many years around the Cley square. I'd been fortunate to hit a nice run of finds on Shetland (including a Subalpine Warbler, a couple of Marsh and Icterine Warblers, three or four Red-backed Shrikes and a showy female Bluethroat) so I felt like I was "in the zone" as it were and was keen to try and carry on the success rate enjoyed on Fair Isle.

Norfolk had enjoyed a run of similar species to those I'd seen up north whilst we were away and I was looking forward to field time to the west and east of Cley. The afternoon of 30th saw the persistent murk roll back and a waft of curious warm air accompanied a light NE breeze. It felt rare and so I set off from home to work the bushes and field margins between Cley and Kelling.

The first couple of hours were disappointing. Aside from a small range of common summer migrant warblers, there wasn't a great deal to note. My first Cuckoo of the year, at the east end of Walsey Hills, livened up proceedings and it was nice to watch three Spoonbills feeding on Watling Water. Despite the relatively poor return, I decided to head on to Kelling Water Meadow, via Meadow Lane, just in case.

It remained quiet until I headed north towards Kelling Hard. To my right, the brambles of Weybourne Camp where a noisy piebald and tangerine male Stonechat was a handsome sight. To the left of the path and straight ahead, a narrow line of reeds sat along side damp pasture. As I wandered down the track an arresting shape crept up from a tall bramble and clambered up a reed stem some 60-70 yards ahead of me. Despite not being on a Shetland stone wall or soggy rank ditch, even before I lifted my binoculars, I recognised the distinctive, slightly stocky and rotund, silhouette immediately. Bluethroat!

The bird was back on and began to flick its tail ~ the combination of black inverted "T" and rich chestnut basal patches reinforced the instant ID. The light wasn't the greatest from the angle I was at, watery sunshine and grey cloud making defined colour hard to note properly, but the upperparts struck me as being a rather lead grey tone over a brownish base colour, certainly appearing darker than the female I'd found on Shetland just a few days before. The creamy supercilium was even in width, extending from the top of the bill base to the above the ear coverts and the face appeared fairly plain and dark grey-brown. Frustratingly, I could only see part of the underparts (given the angle the bird was at), but there was clearly a deep, intense and vibrant blue throat with a narrowish black border apparent below the blue, with some red below that. The bird went back on again, flicked its tail some more and performed a flycatching sallie in to the air, spreading the tail widely, before dropping in to the field. All of this lasted for less than a minute.

Given how scarce male Bluethroats are nowadays in the county, I alerted a few locals and pinged RBA a text (without specifics as to the form, given I couldn't say which it was). The first couple of folks to arrive, Steve Gantlett and Steve Holliday, had flight views only with me (the bird had responded briefly to playback ~ giving a short burst of some characteristic scratchy warbles as per

the start of a Bluethroat song but it didn't go the whole hog) and that was it for the day. I walked the ditch a couple of times, nothing came out. And nothing was seen the following day either.

Despite not seeing the whole of the throat pattern (due to the bird only shifting to being sideways on, at best, on the initial finding views) and given what I thought were rather dark upperparts (even accounting for the indifferent light) I was certainly wary of labelling the bird as a Red-spotted Bluethroat. The temptation was obvious, given the date, but something wasn't quite adding up with what I'd noted plumage-wise (the darkness especially), whilst the reedbed habit chosen by the bird also had me wondering precisely what form I'd just found.

As mentioned above, the bird wasn't seen the following day but just as I arrived at Kelling on June 1st (to look for the Red-backed Shrikes) I met someone who'd just seen the Bluethroat again. Initially he thought it was Redstart, then the bird turned towards him and he saw the blue throat. I asked him if he'd seen any red, and he just mentioned blue. This made me feel more certain that the bird could well be a White-spot but after I popped back to see the female Shrike, the Bluethroat appeared on the fence again and this time, after a direct question from me, it was supposedly seen to be a red-spotted male and the news was relayed to RBA as such.

Not long after, I found the bird again in the reeds on the western side of the meadow; as with views had across the following three days, it was generally distant and elusive but I was still sure I couldn't see red, that the blue on the throat was really prominent and that the upperparts were certainly darker than you'd perhaps expect to see on a nominate bird. The bird had developed a circuit too and generally remained in and around the reed fringes, that behavioural trait piqued my curiosity further.

After seeing it again on June 2nd, I saw it finally on June 3rd when it perched back on and then flew towards me; those same recurring thoughts that it was actually a White-spotted Bluethroat were even stronger now. I was sure I couldn't see red as it flew across the meadow and was pretty confident that it should be visible (or at least there'd be some sort of contrast in the blue). Indeed I was sure I'd again seen white a couple of times, but kept that thought to myself for the moment.

Across the following few days I pieced together a handful of extra details; rather robust looking pale legs (seen to be pinky tinged at one point), beady black eyes and a short, straight dark bill with a pale base (noted as horn brown and yellowy later in the stay). the bands below the blue throat were quite extensive, black above a deep chestnut (the latter being quite broad and being particularly striking in flight on that last day). The belly was a nice creamy white tone with a pale cinnamon tone to the undertail. As far as I know, no one heard the bird singing during the rest of the stay which struck me as unusual.

I spoke to Mike Buckland on the way back to Kelling on June 3rd and mentioned that I thought it was odd (if a Red spot) for a stay of five days in a reedbed on the coast and lamented the fact that each view I'd had on the four days I'd seen it weren't the best as I still needed some convincing that it was *svecica* as was still being broadcast. I mentioned too that I was sure I'd seen white (on more than one occasion) but it was hard to tell people when views were so frustrating. But it surely had to be *cyanecula*.

That evening (June 3rd) I was delighted to see an email from Nigel Rogers. His record shots of the bird taken on June 1st in the reedbed confirmed that initial thought from the first views on Day 1. It was indeed a male White-spotted Bluethroat. Everything fell in to place ~ the plumage teases

and the bird's choice of habitat ~ and the dates were almost a mirror image of the singing male found in the East Bank at Cley in 2013 (June 1st – 11th at least).

The Kelling bird remained to Monday June 4th, there was negative news after that. Nigel Rogers images are perhaps the only ones there are of the bird, but are very helpful for all that.

Mark Golley
Cley, Norfolk
June 2018





Continue on an extra sheet if necessary.