

ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO ICELAND
Land of Ice & Fire

01 – 10 June 2010



Leaders: Andy Jones and Richard Coomber

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A Personal Diary

Tuesday, 01 June

On a damp morning most of the 2010 Ornitholidays' party to Iceland met up at Heathrow for the Icelandair flight to Keflavik, Iceland's main airport just to the south of Reykjavik. Once we were reunited with our luggage we met Andy Jones, our local guide for the tour, and the two Margarets, from Ayr, who had flown in yesterday from Glasgow.

We were soon travelling north along the local 'motorway' to the Snæfellsnes peninsular and our first base at Grundarfjörður. By-passing the main part of Reykjavik we soon reached more rugged country to the north. Andy, who is both an ornithologist and a geologist, pointed out the long ridge to the east, which was, as he explained, the mid-Atlantic Ridge, which for the most part lies beneath the Atlantic Ocean. Here it has risen and shows the line of separation between the North American Plate and the Eurasian Plate. As the journey progressed we passed craters, cinder cones and fissures and drove across lava fields and beneath towering cliffs and vast scree slopes. All good geography textbook stuff. Further on, instead of driving some 45 kms around Hvalfjörður, we drove through a six kilometre tunnel beneath the sea.

Where the flatter ground allowed cultivation the fields tended to be growing grass for use as fodder for livestock in the form of silage. We saw many Whooper Swans in these fields, often just a pair or two, but once a flock of more than over 50 and sometimes a pair or more of Greylag Geese. Along the shorelines were Eiders, the drakes still in good plumage. From fields rose territorial Common Snipe, Common Redshank, European Golden Plover and Whimbrel, either in display or perhaps chasing off a marauding Arctic Skua or a Common Raven. We also saw Black-tailed Godwits along the shores and on the mudflats they shared with Eurasian Oystercatchers. Passerines were few, with Common Starlings and Common Ravens being the most obvious ones, although we did manage to see one or two Redwings and Meadow Pipits with varying degrees of success as we drove along.

The large tidal inlet near Borganes produced the Common Shelduck that Andy had hoped to show us, for it is a rare breeding bird in this part of the world. A flock of eight really-red Red Knot in breeding plumage, however tended to be of more interest. We hoped to see Great Northern Divers on some of the larger lakes and eventually a pair obliged on one, much to Lynn's delight for this was one of the birds she hoped to add to her life list. Hopefully tomorrow we would find others and have better views of this bird, which along with Harlequin Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye, make Iceland its only European breeding area.

As we neared Snæfellsnes, the massive snowy volcanic mountain of Snæfellsjökull stood out clearly to the west and the scenery became more dramatic and stark as we drove up and over the spine of the peninsular, making a photo stop before descending to the northern coast. This road had been a gravel one when I was last here in 2001. Moss Campion and Arctic Poppies still grew along the roadsides, however.

Just after 7 p.m. we arrived at our hotel in the small fishing port of Grundarfjörður. It was a lovely sunny evening and whilst some of the party were settling in, a few of us walked around to the fishing harbour to enjoy excellent view of the local Northern Fulmars and Glaucous Gulls.

After dinner at the hotel Andy outlined plans for tomorrow and warned us that we were so far north we would not be seeing any more darkness at night until we returned to the UK at the end of the tour.

Wednesday, 02 June

Overcast until mid-morning when the sun started to break through. Sunny from late morning onwards and cloudless from mid-afternoon onwards. Bitter north-easterly wind first thing, becoming less cold as the sun appeared, when the wind swung round to the north-west. 13°C.

Following a good buffet breakfast we began the day's birdwatching behind the hotel where the discharge from fish cleansing attracted large numbers of Northern Fulmars, Glaucous Gulls of all ages and a few Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Then it was off in the mini-coach, but we'd gone just a few hundred yards when two ducks close inshore attracted our attention – they were a pair of Harlequin Ducks, but unfortunately they flew before we could disembark and set up the scopes. On a few more yards and there were two more, but these were immature males from last year's breeding season and not particularly well-marked.

Once clear of the town our route took us westwards and we stopped a number of times to see birds that were new for the trip or to search for hoped for species, such as a lingering wintering Iceland Gull that might have been amongst any of the numerous groups of Glaucous Gulls we encountered. Arctic Terns and Common Eiders seemed to be everywhere and along every ledge on the cliffs within sight of the road were Northern Fulmars – hundreds and thousands of them. On reaching some larger lakes and tidal lagoons we found Common Teal, Tufted Duck, several pairs of Greater Scaup as well as Red-breasted Mergansers. Meadow Pipits were seen quite frequently and also the occasional White Wagtail.

The first adrenalin rush came when Roy spotted a soaring immature White-tailed Eagle over the hills and farmland near Mávahlíð on the southern side of the road. It was magnificent and for almost ten minutes we watched as it was harried in turn by Arctic Terns and then Glaucous Gulls. A little further on Andy won an extra biscuit for his lunch for spotting the first Iceland Gull of the trip. They are perhaps misnamed for although the Iceland Gull occurs here in winter, they return to Greenland to breed. The same lagoon held a late-returning Light-bellied Brent Goose; this too should be heading for Greenland or even to the north-east of the Canadian Arctic.

A beach on the outskirts of Ólafsvík produced excellent views of a number of shorebirds – Ringed Plover, Sanderling, Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone. This is a very civilised trip, for a cup of coffee at a café a little further on was most welcome. Everywhere there were even more Arctic Terns and Common Eiders, but Red-necked Phalaropes in a pool beside the road near Rif was the cause of another stop. Now the sun was out properly and with the sun behind them the photographers should have managed some good images. Photographer or not we all enjoyed sitting and watching the spectacle of nine of these delightful birds feeding and even mating in the small pond in front of us. Another Iceland Gull was found with other gulls on the large lagoon on the southern side of the road.

By now it was almost lunchtime and to find somewhere sheltered and out of the wind we took the side road to Ingjaldshóll Church. Here Common Snipe drummed overhead, Whimbrel chased off an Arctic Skua and the clouds seemed to be lifting off the summit of Snæfellsjökull, which dominates the western end of Snæfellsnes Peninsular.

Magnificent coastal scenery and breeding seabirds on the cliffs of the extreme western end of the peninsular occupied us for the afternoon. Northern Fulmars and Black-legged Kittiwakes passed in large numbers and on the cliffs below us the latter breed alongside Brünnich's and Common Guillemots and Razorbills, whilst offshore we saw single Atlantic Puffin and Black Guillemot. Some of the Common Guillemots were of the 'Bridled' form. Away from the cliff edges were Northern Wheatears and Snow Buntings. The bird of the day, seen by Andy and just a handful of the party, was a Barn Swallow that flew by as the rest of us were trying to see the cetacean that Sue saw blow a couple of times a long way offshore. Perhaps the whale dived deep for it never reappeared. A botanical foray produced Mountain Avens, masses of Moss Campion as well as Alpine Mouse-ear, Tufted Saxifrage and the tiny green fern, Moonwort.

Had we not stopped to see eight or nine Harlequin Ducks in a fast flowing stretch of river near the road, our return would have been relatively uneventful, but stop we did and we ended up having fabulous views of the splendid males as they escorted their females and defended them from the advances of other males. Sea Rocket and Sea Pea were growing in the sand at the top of the beach there.

It was a highly satisfied group that returned to the hotel at 6.15 p.m. and had dinner at 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday, 03 June

Mixed overcast and sunny, without yesterday's chilly wind. 13°C

Shelagh and Jean came to breakfast with news of nine Harlequin Ducks around the rocks just along the road from the hotel, so before we left at 9 a.m., some if not all of the group went along to enjoy views in glorious sunshine. Nearby a pair of Eurasian Oystercatchers had their nest of two eggs in a parking area – the off-duty bird standing sentinel on top of a nearby roof!

We headed eastwards in the minibus, stopping before long at the turning to Bjarnarhöfn, where we admired the Arctic Poppies growing at the roadside. *Racomitrium*, a moss, smothered the fragmented lava flow that covered a vast area from an eruption about two thousand years ago. A few small willows and stunted junipers grew in sheltered recesses. Just as we were about to re-board the bus I heard a male Rock Ptarmigan crowing and spotted it on a prominent outcrop. Those on board piled out and all had binocular views but before we could get the scopes set up it disappeared behind a rock.

As we drove down the Bjarnarhöfn road a shout from Shelagh towards the back of the bus brought Andy to a stop and our second White-tailed Eagle sighting of the tour. This one was also an immature and after circling for a few minutes dropped down to land out of sight beyond the edge of the lava flow nearer the sea. We set off in pursuit, but didn't see it again until it flew in from our right crossing low over the road a quarter of a mile or more ahead. As we watched it was mobbed in turn by pair of Common Ravens, Whimbrel, Common Snipe and a Common Redshank. In driving the unfortunate eagle away, the unlikely alliance also drove it from view and we never saw it again.

Just north of the small town and port of Stykkishólmur we turned down a side road to the farm and church of Helgafell (= Holy Mountain), where on the large lake below the we saw our first Great Northern Diver on its nest thanks to the telescopes, for it was right at the far end. Below us a Red-necked Phalarope fed in and out of the waterside vegetation and here, as well as so many other places where we stopped in Iceland, the air was full of the drumming of Common Snipe, the song of Common Redshanks and the bubbling of Whimbrels.

The rest of the day was spent on the southern side of Snæfellsnes peninsular and on the way we saw our first Red-throated Diver, but we would have better views of a pair later in the day. Our exploration of the southern coast began at the delightful bay of Ytri Tunga, a sweeping sandy bay where Sea Rocket, Sea Sandwort and Oysterplant grew along the top of the beach and where Common Ringed Plover and Eurasian Oystercatchers held territories above the tide-line. Seaweed covered rocks dotted the bay and coastline creating sheltered inlets for numerous Common Eider duck families, one female and two drakes were escorting 27 tiny balls of fluff that valiantly kept up with them. There were a lot of drake Common Eiders around and as they displayed to the few unattached females, they showed erect white 'sails' on their backs reminiscent of the black ones, so characteristic of a drake King Eider – if only! Out on the larger rocks Grey and Common Seals were hauled out and one Common Seal was particularly obliging for us. Another female already had given birth to its pup of the year.

Swimming along the water's edge were a handful of Red-necked Phalaropes, whilst on the lower part of the beach migrant Sanderling, a Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone fed hungrily, whereas the Common Ringed Plover and Dunlin were probably those breeding nearby and the Purple Sandpipers would probably be nesting a bit further inland.

Ytri Tunga was one of those places you could spend quality time just sitting and watching and soaking up the atmosphere of the place and the comings and goings of the birds and seals. Where better than this to have our picnic?

After lunch we set off again westwards stopping at a number of the large lagoons along the roadside, that provided good views of a pair of Red-throated Divers and our best so far of a Great Northern. Two lagoons had a pair each of immaculate Slavonian Grebes, which in full breeding plumage look so different from the black and white birds we might see around our coasts in winter. There were good numbers of Tufted Ducks as well as a few pairs of Greater Scaup and Eurasian Wigeon. In the hay fields surrounding the waters were parties of non-breeding Whooper Swans, although we did also see a bird on its nest.

The final birding of the day was around the small settlement of Arnarstapi, where along the coast beyond the tiny harbour, hundreds of Black-legged Kittiwakes and Northern Fulmars bred on the distorted columnar basalt cliffs, sometimes seeming to be scarcely more than an arm's length away. This was what Andy had brought us to see and hear, but he hadn't anticipated that Penny would find a drake King Eider amongst a raft of Common ones offshore. Roy was particularly pleased as it was one of the few new life birds he might see on the tour. We had a splendid walk along the cliffs watching the ducks and the breeding seabirds. A few auks were passing offshore and on a couple of occasions we saw Black Guillemots fishing in the sea below us. The air was full of the cries of the Black-legged Kittiwakes with Common Snipe drumming and Common Redshanks singing in the background. As Andy went back to fetch the minibus we went a little further to a café for refreshments before heading back to our base at Grundarfjörður on a mountain road up and over the spine of Snæfellsnes.

Heading east along the north coast we again enjoyed good views of more Harlequin Ducks in the early evening sunshine; for by now the sun was shining and we were in for another beautiful Icelandic evening.

Friday, 04 June

A glorious day and warmer too! 16°C

The fjord was like a millpond as we loaded the minibus and headed eastwards away from Grundarfjörður on the next leg of our journey, but we hadn't gone far when three Light-bellied Brent Geese were spotted feeding on the water's edge. A bit further on and Roy called the bus to a halt when he spotted yet another White-tailed Eagle. This time it was perched on a seaweed-covered rock on the shore. It was an immature and in fact might even have been the same bird we had seen not far away yesterday.

Beyond the turning to Stykkishólmur, the still blue waters of Álftafjörður was dotted with well over a hundred Whooper Swans – nothing like the thousands that Andy said assemble there prior to their autumn migration south-eastwards. Another stop in the area was overlooking the skerries and islets that are scattered across the entrance to Hvammsfjörður, where from our vantage point we could look across to the rusting hulk of a fishing boat that was wrecked some time ago. Two or three pairs of Northern Wheatears were sorting out a territorial dispute below us, whilst at our feet grew more Moss Campion and clumps of Tufted Saxifrage.

At Buðardalur we made a coffee stop at a service station where the tour's first Common Redpolls were heard, if not seen. Beyond we entered a broad fertile valley, whose settlement of some ten farms dates back over 1,000 years to Viking times. In the green fields more Whooper Swans shared the grazing with Icelandic sheep. The sheep also were to be found on the rougher pasture and adjacent moorland over which Meadow Pipits song-flighted. They in turn provide food for the local Merlins, one of which some of us saw flying rapidly over the fields and across the road behind the bus. Several of the lakes set amongst the moorland as we crossed the plateau at the top of the valley held pairs of Whoopers and we passed at least one on a nest near the road. One small lake held a pair of Red-throated Divers. Otherwise these uplands seemed fairly birdless, although Andy said that Purple Sandpipers could breed there.

The waters of the next fjord, Hrótafjörður, were much choppier and covered with white horses. To the northern (seaward) end a bank of sea fog indicated a temperature inversion, where the warm air from the land met the cold waters of the sea. We dropped down to an almost derelict village on a gravel spit that jutted out into the fjord. Once it had been an important trading port in northern Iceland, but today most of the activity was the comings and goings of Arctic Skuas chasing Arctic Terns and a flock of Sanderlings pottering along the water's edge that attracted our attention. Further out a distant Red-throated Diver and some Atlantic Puffins were seen through the scopes. A pair of Eurasian Oystercatchers on the end of the spit, where a group of Common Eiders rested on the shingle, had recently lost at least one egg to a marauding gull or Common Raven. We had an ample picnic around a well-sited picnic table and it was from there that we watched a flock of six Pink-footed Geese flying northwards out of the fjord. Later, as we were about to leave, a pair of Great Northern Divers appeared just offshore to give excellent views. They must have been engaged in some pair-bonding ritual for on a number of occasions they would swim around one another before one would dive leaving the other behind on the surface.

Our route took us around Hrítafjörður, where we ran into the sea mist before heading inland into clear skies and on to the next fjord. Ahead the scenery was becoming more dramatic with snow remaining from last winter on the ramparts of the mountains to the east of Blönduós, a small town near the sea straddling the Blanda River. There were plenty of Greylag Geese in the area, some with very young goslings, and a stop near the river mouth yielded Arctic Terns and Black-legged Kittiwakes bathing in the fresh water of the river. There were a few Sanderling along the muddy shore of the river and around the mouth itself were a few more Harlequin Ducks.

Amongst a small group of gulls Andy found a sub-adult Kumlien's race of Iceland Gull, which breeds in Arctic Canada. According the *Gulls of the Americas* by Howell and Dunn (2007) it has had a chequered taxonomic history. When it was first described it was thought to be a full species. Then it was considered to be a hybrid between Thayer's (which was considered a subspecies of Iceland at the time) and what is now American Herring Gull, only to become a full species again, before being demoted to its present rank of being a race of Iceland. With the influence of DNA in taxonomy it will probably be restored to full specific status yet again!

We just happened to have stopped next to a small tea-room that did the most delicious waffles – we should know, we tried some!

Our journey then took us up the broad valley of the River Heradsvotn. In small ponds beside the road we passed a few Common Gulls, Red-necked Phalaropes, Greater Scaup, Common Teal and yet more Harlequin Ducks. The highlight, however, where the pairs and small parties of Pink-footed Geese that also lived there, some of which were escorting recently hatched goslings. We headed into classic glaciated country with U-shaped and hanging valleys – more good text book stuff. The mountains above became more spectacular, but frustratingly there was nowhere to stop to appreciate the scenery and take photos until we headed down the other side of the watershed. There we spent 15 minutes or more admiring the views of our surroundings and also enjoying the patch of pink Trailing Azalea, Woolly and Dwarf Willows and the dusky Netted Mountain Moth that is a day-flying species. When one comes to thinking about it most Iceland moth species are probably day-flying as there is no night at this time of the year, and when there is night it is probably too cold for moths anyway!

It wasn't much further to Akureyri, Iceland's second largest city and capital of the north. Our base for the next three nights was a guest farm a few kilometres to the south, where an hour or so after checking-in we were tucking into a splendid traditional Icelandic buffet dinner that included the most delicious pickled herrings with rye bread as a starter, smoked lamb with vegetables and potatoes as the main course and, not sticky toffee pudding, but Icelandic cheeses with grapes.

We ended another splendid day with the checklist and Andy outlining the plans for tomorrow. Some of those who went for a post-dinner stroll found Common Redpolls nearby and watched Black-tailed Godwits flying to and from feeding in the surrounding fields.

Saturday, 05 June

Overcast with sea mist for much of the day, then a fine clear latter part to the afternoon before the clouds and mists came in again during the evening. 12°C

After yesterday's travelling day, today was different, beginning with the make-your-own picnic lunch at the guesthouse. Many places serving a buffet breakfast ask guests not to take food items away for later consumption – here we were encouraged to do so. Therefore, if one had any complaints, there was no-one to blame but one's self! We left promptly at 8.30 a.m. for the small port of Árskógssandi, from where we caught a ferry to the small island of Hrisey near the entrance to Eyjafjörður. Beneath the clouds the smooth waters made for an easy passage, but apart from a group of five Atlantic Puffins flying by and the occasional Northern Fulmar passing there were few birds around. In the small port at Hrisey, were Black Guillemot and a few Common Eiders. We were piped ashore by a male Snow Bunting singing from a pole on the quay. Common Redpolls and Redwings seemed to be common around the gardens of the brightly painted houses and the air was full of the sound of drumming Common Snipe and piping Common Redshank.

Andy led us on a four kilometre circular walk around the southern part of the eight kilometre square island along well marked tracks and footpaths. Before long we were enjoying the first of a number of good views of Rock Ptarmigan, generally males, but during the course of the walk two females were also seen. White feathers from the moulting birds were seemingly everywhere and two or three times we came across the plucked remains of an unfortunate bird that might well have been the victim of a Gyr Falcon. The latter breed on the mainland, but cross to Hrisey to hunt the island's large Rock Ptarmigan population.

Apparently the locals are very proud of the small hide they have erected overlooking a small freshwater pond. It was a wee bit small for a group of our size and today only a gathering of bathing Arctic Terns from the huge colony on the island's high central ridge, and an incubating female Common Eider, could be seen. As we climbed the hill the path passed through an area of extensive fish drying racks where the filleted remains of large cod hung to be dried thoroughly before being ground up for use as fish meal. Larch trees were planted on the slopes and no doubt were large enough to create suitable breeding habitat for both Common Redpoll and Redwing. Soon the habitat changed to Arctic heath, where large mats of pink flowering Trailing Azalea grew, contrasting with the ivory white of the Mountain Avens. Hummocks of grey moss grew alongside Crowberry, Bilberry and Ling. Berries from the former were still on the bushes from last autumn, having been deep frozen by the first snows before anything could eat them before us. They were a somewhat tasteless, but interesting experience.

The photographers had a field day with one Golden Plover in particular. It just came closer and closer, unlike the Whimbrel and Arctic Skuas that remained aloof, sometimes disappearing into the mists that drifted across the landscape from the north. Having crossed the top of the island the path dropped down to the east coast, where we had our picnics overlooking a number of Northern Fulmars that were breeding on a large basalt dyke that ran out into the sea. We were just a few metres south of 66°N and about 50 kms south of the Arctic Circle at 66° 33'N, just to the north of Iceland, where it passes through the offshore island of Grimsey. A bit of light relief, for want of a better word, came when Shelagh, using Andy's GPS, led the ladies to find 66°N – Furthest North!

For part of the return leg of our walk we followed the coastline. Andy spotted a lone Harbour Porpoise passing north offshore and on one of the beaches below us were the vertebrae of a small whale. Once up and over the hill we dropped down through the larch trees and back down to the small settlement, where Common Redpolls gave us very good views and as we visited the local church a male Rock Ptarmigan display-flighted around the small spire! Along the verges we saw more Heath Dog-violets than we had seen up on the heaths and also added Sweet Cicely and Red Campion to the botanical list, the latter being an escapee from one of the gardens.

The journey back to the mainland was uneventful and at the minibus we enjoyed a hot cuppa and a chocolate biscuit (or two) before heading south to Akureyri and into warm sunshine once more. There was time for some retail therapy while Andy and I took the minibus off to refuel and wash. Most of us then met up in the café of a smart bookshop in town.

Before returning to the guesthouse we drove inland alongside the Glerá River. Black-tailed Godwits, Whimbrel and Greylag Geese were common, whilst in the river were more Harlequins and two drake Northern Pintail that Andy was particularly glad to see, although it has to be said not as excited as he was over the Common Shelduck the other day! Across the other side of the swiftly flowing river were some 40+ non-breeding Whooper Swans and more Common Gulls than we had seen anywhere so far on the tour.

We reached the guesthouse with an hour or more before dinner, but by that time low cloud and the mists had returned, so those who had been up late last night to catch the sun at midnight must have been glad they did!

Sunday, 06 June

Overcast with low cloud and sea mist near the coast, fine and almost cloudless inland. 14°C

We left for Lake Mývatn after breakfast, but hadn't gone far before we stopped to admire a female Long-tailed Duck close to the road on one of the lagoons as we headed along beside the Glerá River near Akureyri. Today we didn't cross the river towards the town, but took Route 1 eastwards along the fjord and up over the hills and inland.

Our first stop was at the impressive waterfall at Goðafoss, where the River Skjálfandafljót drops 12 metres across a width of 30 metres. Historically it is of great importance to the conversion of Iceland to Christianity for around 1,000 AD, the speaker of the parliament at Þingvellir, Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði, threw his effigies of the Norse gods into the waterfall. Apart from seeing the falls we had good views of a male Rock Ptarmigan resting on a roadside rock and saw another further away. Growing along the path to the view point was Bearberry in flower and then while we were using the nearby facilities and enjoying a coffee, Sue spotted a Merlin perched on a post by one of the bridges that span the river. Unfortunately it had gone by the time the retail therapists emerged!

Further on we passed a lake with our first Common Scoter as well as the commoner species of wildfowl and a Great Northern Diver. As we neared Lake Mývatn another pond held our first Barrow's Goldeneyes and Whooper Swans. The weather began to brighten, so that by the time we reached the tumbling waters of the Laxá River the sun was out and we were enjoying superb views of a number of Harlequin Ducks. By Laxá Farm we stopped and were able to photograph two or three in close range as they fed from the surface of the river. The area is 'famed' for its flies or rather its *Chironimid* midges as they are more correctly called. With the warmth they were about, but thankfully not in the vast numbers that Andy and I have experienced on previous visits. Nevertheless the shops that sold fly veils did a good trade and whilst we might have looked like little green men from another universe, we were able to keep birding. Before we left the first stop I picked up two very distant Gyr Falcons circling to the north, which some of the party saw with varying degrees of success, but displaying shorebirds, such as Common Snipe and European Golden Plover, in the same direction only served to confuse.

We then birded from the bus along a gravel track by one of the many small sheltered bays around the main part of the lake. Here we found more Barrow's Goldeneyes as well as familiar species, such as Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Tufted Duck and Greater Scaup. We also had our best views so far of Slavonian Grebe.

Working our way around the lake along the main road we reached another side road, where we stopped and had out picnic lunches on top of a craggy hillock, for around that part of the lake the lava formations from past volcanic eruptions are quite spectacular, as are the pseudo-craters formed when the lava had flowed over marsh areas. Following lunch Andy took us on a walk beside one pond where Arctic Char swam in its deep waters and where we had brilliant views of Barrow's Goldeneyes and the most amazing views of Slavonian Grebes as we looked down from the low cliff above them. Redwings and Common Redpolls sang from the trees in the woods across the entrance to the pond from the main lake. The iconic photos one sees of lava formations in the lake are taken from there and of course we took ours as well. Having heard snatches of Winter Wren song we were delighted when one flew across into the birches just below us. The Icelandic race of Wren is much larger than ours, and may warrant specific recognition.

Our path took us back to the track and overlooking another small pond, where about 100 male Barrow's Goldeneyes loafed. This was a post-breeding pre-moulting flock and represented a fair percentage of the males from the 400-800 breeding pairs in the area. This North American species' only breeding area in Europe is in the Mývatn area. We were almost back to the minibus when Andy and some of the party saw another Gyr Falcon, but this one was much closer as it crossed the track a few hundred yards ahead of us to disappear amongst the pools and lava crags near our picnic area. We searched in vain, both there and further on, but to no avail. The other area was in an elevated position overlooking lava outcrops and birch woodland.

Another place where we had a short walk was around a fissure near the small settlement of Reykjahlíð. Winter Wren was a possibility there, but not today, although there was botanical interest with Herb Paris growing in one of its few sites on the island and tufts of Bladder Ferns growing from the rocks. The landscape beyond the *pahoehoe* lava flows on the west side of Reykjahlíð was covered with birch scrub and dotted with small ponds and marshy areas.

Before beginning our journey back to the guesthouse we completed our circumnavigation of the lake passing through the richest area for breeding wildfowl around its shores. So important is the site that access is mainly restricted to the tarmac road, from which we saw several pairs of Common Scoter and many of the other wildfowl species of the lake including the only drake Northern Pintail of the day; a female had been seen earlier

Having bade farewell to the Harlequins on the Laxá River we returned to the guesthouse, arriving shortly before 7 p.m. to find that the sun had only emerged there about 3 p.m. We had been lucky to have had such a splendid day in one of Iceland's premier birding sites. Afterwards some of the party went for a stroll, or perhaps stayed up to see the Midnight Sun, which actually sets briefly soon after. Mike went down to the valley below the guesthouse and was rewarded with two Short-eared Owls!

Monday, 07 June

Generally fine and sunny, although overcast for a period during the afternoon and again in the evening. 13°C, but much warmer than that in sheltered places in the sunshine.

Before breakfast Shelagh came excitedly along the corridor outside the bedrooms calling us to see a Short-eared Owl quartering the rough fields across the valley floor and later as we were loading the luggage it was seen again, so that by the time we left everyone had had reasonable views.

Our route during the morning retraced the afternoon's journey to reach this part of northern Iceland. There were differences such as the passing through the magnificent mountain scenery in sunshine today and seeing several Goosanders on various stretches of the swift flowing rivers. We had another Short-eared Owl too as we made our way up the valley beyond Akureyri.

Along the graded River Heraðsvotn, where we had seen Pink-footed Geese previously, more geese and their goslings had appeared on the pools and gravel spits that jutted out into the river. Birding as we sped along resulted in the regular waders and wildfowl species, including Harlequin Duck, being called as we passed fields, pools and lagoons.

Eventually we stopped for lunch by the shore of Hrutafjörður. Icelandic Ponies watched us from a nearby field, but seemed not to be interested on the apple cores offered as we prepared to leave afterwards. Down on the shore a small party of Dunlin fed along the water's edge and there were some Common Seals hauled out on rocks in the fjord.

It wasn't long after lunch before we started to head into new country as we drove south on Route 1 and away from the more rugged country of the Iceland's north and west. Andy pointed out an ice cap and glaciers to the east, before one by one we dozed off in the warmth of the afternoon sunshine. Thankfully he didn't!

By mid-afternoon we reached Borganes, joining the outward route that we took almost a week ago, but before we reached the tunnel beneath Hvalfjörður, we turned off eastwards and drove around much of the fjord. Flocks of Eurasian Oystercatchers loafed on the shore, parties of Northern Fulmars bathed in the sea and almost every beach had a party of resting Common Eiders, mainly drakes that had no doubt done their duty and were not gathering to moult. When we made a stop it was to admire the dramatic cliffs and coastline of the upper reaches of the fjord. There had been masses of Mountain Ravens as we drove along, but when we stopped we came across mats of Wild Thyme growing along the verges along with Northern and Lady's Bedstraws, Field Forget-me-not and White Clover.

Our route soon took another turn when a gravel road took us across to the site of the ancient parliament at Þingvellir, which was where a spreading rift valley, but not on the scale of the one in East Africa, separated the North American Plate from the Eurasian one. It gave us the chance for a walk, for as Andy took the minibus and trailer some seven kilometres around to the car park in the middle of the valley, we walked the few hundred yards down to the same spot from our craggy vantage point. The well-worn path led down to the parliament site along a broad fissure passing banks of Wood Crane's-bill growing at the foot of the high cliffs. Overhead a displaying European Golden Plover did his butterfly display flight for minutes on end, almost emulating a skylark! The path then crossed a river, where Mike found a confiding Greylag Goose crossing the path and then, when we were re-united with Andy, a male and three female Barrow's Goldeneye obligingly did several rapid fly-bys of the car park before landing in the river. Not a common bird in southern Iceland, but we were told that several pairs do nest on the large lake near Þingvellir.

It was not far to Hveragerði and our hotel, but on the way we were treated to brilliant views of yet another Short-eared Owl attacking a Common Raven perched on a telegraph pole within its territory. We were lucky the Common Raven resisted the first two or three attacks, for we had a grandstand view watching from the bus. When the corvid did eventually fly the owl repeated dive-bombed it until the larger bird was well and truly driven away.

Before long we were settling into our hotel, the largest we had stayed in during the tour, and the only one with a bath!

Tuesday, 08 June

An overcast start becoming brighter during the morning, followed by a sunny afternoon. Warm. 14°C

Our day's activities began with a visit to the hot springs at the back of the town that appeared after an earthquake of 6.3 on the Richter scale only a couple of years ago. The steam and scalding water rose and bubbled away from the bare slopes that were now only being colonised by Sea and Moss Campions and some small buttercup plants. Redwings sang from the surrounding trees and Northern Fulmars were nesting on the cliffs above us.

We then headed to the south coast, beginning with the mouth of the broad Ölfusá River, where vast mudflats of seemingly sterile lava sand attracted few birds although there were Red-breasted Mergansers and a lone Red-throated Diver in the river and in the sea beyond a line of sand dunes created by long shore drift were more divers, including a Great Northern. Across the bridge that spanned the river were two villages, Eyrarbakki and Stokkseyri, that had once been important trading ports: we birded from the seawall of the first and had a coffee at the second. Birdwise a few Northern Gannets were passing westwards, whilst the first of a number of Great Skuas was going in the opposite direction. Common Eiders, Whooper Swans and a few Red-necked Phalaropes were seen amongst the offshore rocks, while numerous clumps of Oysterplant grew along the top of the beach, both here and further along. Nearby we watched yet another hunting Short-eared Owl, until it flew away from the roadside fields.

Andy explained that the vast flat area that stretched inland and way to the south of us was the largest post glacial lava flow anywhere in the world and that geologists have estimated that 25 km³ of lava were spewed out during that eruption that took place inland about 10,000 years ago. The fields, (a mixture of cultivated ones and rough ones) were home to numerous Icelandic ponies. Pools held a pair of Slavonian Grebes, Red-throated Divers and Whooper Swans.

To the east at Knarrósviti a lighthouse stood sentinel to warn shipping of the hazardous rocks and reefs at the seaward end of the lava flow. It was there that we ended the morning's birding and later as we were having our picnic on the beach as the sun began to appear. A trickle of Great Skuas passed eastwards along the coast. Common Redshanks were breeding and defending their territories in the rank grassy areas between the lighthouse and the beach, where there were also a few pairs of Arctic Terns. Compared with some places there were few Common Snipe, Black-tailed Godwits and Whimbrels, but a good few Meadow Pipits.

The afternoon was spent visiting several of the scenic wonders of southern Iceland and looking across to more distant ones such as the icecap Landjökull and its glaciers, the volcano of Hekla that erupted a few years ago, but not the current antagonist, Eyjafjallajökull, which was shrouded in cloud. Our first stop was at the beautiful falls of Urriðafoss, which we enjoyed with just two or three other people. Later, at the more spectacular double falls of Gullfoss, there were many more visitors. These magnificent falls and the Ölfusá River that flows over them was the same river that created the vast estuary we had visited earlier in the morning. My previous visit had been in the rain, but today the sun was shining, creating a vivid rainbow in the spray. About half the party stayed dry today, whilst the rest in their waterproof anoraks walked through the spray to an even more spectacular view point than those visited along the boardwalks. Flowers grew in profusion, but there were few birds in the area.

A few kilometres away was the original area of Geysir, where Strokkur (The Churn) regularly blows every six to eight minutes, but unlike the sustained blows of Old Faithful, these are rather brief. We saw several eruptions and those who stood closer to the geyser marvelled at the dome of turquoise water that rose at the moment of the eruption. David took the perfect dome nanoseconds before it spouted. The only bird of note

was a Redwing that frequently flew across the area with food and back for more. After leaving the area we stopped briefly to see the small water-filled crater of Kerid.

Once back at the hotel there was time before dinner and the checklist for some of the party to enjoy a good swim in the hotel's pool or a good soak in one of the two hot tubs nearby.

Wednesday, 09 June

Overcast with rain during and after dinner in the evening. 11°C.

Under leaden skies we left the hotel for the old fishing harbour in Reykjavik, where we boarded the Elding whale watching boat for a morning cruising Faxaflói Bay bird-watching and scanning for whales. Andy got us there early and we were able to get a good viewing position on the deck over the bridge, which was great as the boat was quite busy this morning.

Jean and Shelagh opted to stay on *terra firma*, so Andy took them birding along the coast a short way out of town before giving them a city tour that included the Pearl, a dome, museum and shops overlooking the city and also the Lutheran church of Hallgrímskirkja, that dominates views of the city. It was named after the Icelandic poet and clergyman Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614-74) and is of a modern design, but although started in 1945, it was not finished until 1986!

The sailors left port at 9 a.m., but it was a frustrating morning for any passengers not interested in birds. Arctic Terns, gulls and Northern Fulmars were almost constant companions. Atlantic Puffins whizzed by to and from the large breeding colony on the small grassy islet of Akurey near the harbour entrance, which we were to see at closer range before we returned at lunchtime. We passed Common Guillemots and Razorbills on the sea and at one time a lone Manx Shearwater crossed our bows without deviation or hesitation.

Our vessel criss-crossed the bay until we eventually found a lone Minke Whale, that surfaced in front of us several times giving good views to all. By that time many of the other passengers had gone below for a warming cup of coffee or a snack. We had stuck it out and were in pole position for both the whale and, as we returned to harbour, of the thousands of Atlantic Puffins that wheeled around over Akurey.

About half an hour later than anticipated, we arrived in port about 12.30 p.m., where Andy and the ladies were awaiting our return on the quayside. From there we went down to the small lighthouse along the shore from the city and had our picnic lunch. Unlike other days most chose to having theirs inside the minibus and out of the wind. Common Eiders loafed around the shore and nearby was a large Arctic Tern colony at the lighthouse, but wisely the area was closed to the public to prevent disturbance to the birds. Earlier Jean and Shelagh had found Sea Mayweed, an addition to our growing plant list.

A brief stop was made at the Pearl, for the rest of us to enjoy the view and to use the facilities it offered before we drove south to explore part of the Reykjanes Peninsular. We began by visiting a dramatic view point in a world of rocks made from compacted volcanic ash by the shores of a lake, Kleifarvatn. It was a bleak and desolate landscape where there were no birds and only pink and white clumps of Moss Campion, Arctic Mouse-ear and Sea Campion added any colour to the shades of browns and greys of the area. Further on we visited the geo-thermal area of Krysuvik, where steaming vents had deposited sulphur around their entrances and boiling mud pools did what they do best – *plop!*

The coast at Strandarkirkja was our final stop of the afternoon. We began with a belated birthday tea party for Roy and Margery, whose birthdays had been earlier on the tour. The elderly lady who owned the tea room was delighted to have a group turn up, for there were precious few other tourists in this remote corner of the island. The pancakes were interesting and she insisted that we tried her chocolate cake as well! All around were breeding Arctic Terns in quite dense numbers, but as they were still on eggs, this was hardly the hard hat area it would become when they had chicks.

Offshore a few Northern Gannets were passing as well as a single Great Skua spotted by Roy. The tide was against us really for had it been lower we might have seen more shorebirds as it is an important area for migrant shorebirds. A few weeks ago Andy had seen over 1,000 Red Knot there as well as the other common shorebirds of the coasts and beaches. They would have been on their way through to Greenland, but today

we had to settle for just five Ruddy Turnstones. Danish Scurvygrass grew down on the shore and in the shelter of the sea wall Margeret added Kidney Vetch. There were a pair of Northern Wheatears carrying food around the nearby churchyard, whose church was built with funds provided by a sea captain as a thank you for being saved following being wrecked on the coast.

Soon after we returned to the hotel the rain started and set in for the night.

Thursday, 10 June

Overcast during the morning with rain or drizzle until lunchtime, brighter in the afternoon. 11°C

After breakfast we loaded the luggage for the last time and left the Hotel Ork for a day that made the best of the bad weather. First stop was the power station at Heillisheidi on the Hengill geo-thermal area. It was an amazing place generating electricity and hot water from the boreholes down in the geo-thermal areas. We had a charming guide, who not only impressed us, but Andy as well with her delivery of information and the way she fielded our questions. The graphics of the information displays were equally impressive, especially the largest touch-sensitive screen in Europe – it was something like 15' by 10'. It is also shown in the internet – see <http://www.or.is/flash/framl/index.html>.

From there we headed into the city if Reykjavik for some sightseeing, but as we passed The Pool, an area of water by the City Hall, I thought I saw a drake Ring-necked Duck with some Tufted on the water with other wildfowl. Andy was able to stop round the corner and I checked through his scope. It was raining steadily and the views were a bit distant, but it looked good. We were all dropped outside the City Hall and whilst some went to look at the nearby cathedral and other buildings, whilst Lynn and Marilyn came with me to look at the duck again. Given the rain, the lack of light and without a telescope I convinced myself that it was a hybrid. Only after the ladies had gone sight-seeing I managed to get better views and some photos that showed the banding on the bill as well as the grey and white side panel and the distinctive head shape. I played the call of a female from my iPod and immediately it perked up and looked decidedly interested, but unfortunately didn't swim across to me as a pair of Greater Scaup did when I tried their calls. So we had rare duck number two and that took our final trip total to 74 (plus Kumlien's race of Iceland Gull).

Once we were all reunited with Andy and the bus (he had been able to dash across to join me very briefly to see the duck, without getting a parking ticket) the magnificent church of Hallgrimskirkja was our final stop. It is a wonderful building, but unlike yesterday there was no-one playing the organ. Outside stood a bronze statue of a Viking from Iceland, Leifr Eriksson, who had left Greenland and discovered the New World, perhaps Labrador and later Newfoundland.

Our last picnic was taken on the quay at Vogor. While we were there the rain eased off, but there were only a few of the more familiar species to be seen in the area. By the time we reached Keflavik airport and said goodbye to Andy, and the two Margarets, who were flying back to Scotland tomorrow, the sun was beginning to break through with the promise of a fine afternoon. Too late today for us unfortunately.

Our Icelandair Boeing 757 left a few minutes late at around 4.20 p.m., but might have landed at Heathrow on time had we not been stacked for about quarter of an hour. Once reunited with our luggage in the baggage hall we bade one another farewell and headed off on the last legs of our journeys home.

Acknowledgements

Thank you all for coming, for being such good company and for your help in various ways. It was a most enjoyable holiday and quite a relaxed one under the overall guidance of Andy Jones, whose depth of knowledge about his adopted country, its culture, historical heritage, its geology and wildlife was phenomenal. The easy manner with which he passed on this information over the minibus's PA system added to our overall enjoyment of this fascinating country and its wildlife. His careful and considerate driving deserves thanks too! I've rarely known a better group for punctuality, although I should have realised that before the tour started when I arrived an hour early at Heathrow to find that three-quarters of the party were there ahead of me! At the moment Nigel is busy in the office working on the Ornitholidays' 2011 programme and I hope we'll meet up again on another tour before too long. There'll be plenty to choose from as usual.

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August 2010

Itinerary and Weather

- 01 June** Afternoon flight to Keflavik and then minibus across to Grundarfjörður on north coast of Snæfellsnes Peninsular.
Overcast with brief shower during afternoon, becoming brighter later. 12°C
- 02 June** Day excursion to western end of Snæfellsnes birding along the way. Lunch at Ingjaldshóll.
Overcast 'til mid-morning. Sunny from late morning onwards. Bitter north-easterly wind first thing, becoming less cold as the sun appeared, when the wind swung round to the north-west. 13°C.
- 03 June** Day exploration of Snæfellsnes, mainly on southern side.
Mixed overcast and sunny, without yesterday's chilly wind. 13°C.
- 04 June** Transfer to Akureyri birding en route. Lunch at Blönduós.
A glorious day and warmer too! 16°C
- 05 June** Day excursion to island of Hrisey.
Overcast with mists for much of day brightening in late afternoon until mist returned in evening. 12°C
- 06 June** Day excursion to Lake Mývatn.
Overcast first thing, improving mid a.m. for rest of the day. 14°C
- 07 June** Transfer to Hveragerði, birding en route and afternoon visit to Þingvellir.
Generally fine and sunny, although overcast for a period during the afternoon and again in the evening. 13°C, but felt much warmer.
- 08 June** Visit to hot springs at Hveragerði, before birding along south coast. Lunch at Knarrósviti.
Then visit to Urridafoss, Gullfoss and Geysir.
Overcast becoming brighter during the morning, followed by a sunny afternoon. Warm.
14°C
- 09 June** Morning whale-watching trip in Faxaflói Bay, or city tour. Afternoon visit to southern coast of Reykanes Peninsular.
Overcast all day with rain early evening onwards. 11°C
- 10 June** Morning visit to Heillisheidi Geo-thermal power station and to Reykjavik, birding around The Pool. Lunch at Vogor. Late afternoon flight to London arriving that evening.
Overcast during the morning with rain or drizzle until lunchtime, brighter in the afternoon.
11°C

CHECKLIST OF SPECIES SEEN DURING THE TOUR

| No of days recorded | Location | Abundance Scale |
|---------------------|--|------------------------|
| 1 2h means seen on | A= Snæfellsnes Peninsular and east to Blönduós | (max. seen on one day) |
| 1 day and heard on | S = Northern Iceland centred on Akureyri & includes Lake Mývatn | 1 = 1 – 4 |
| 2 other days | H = Southern Iceland centred on Hveragerði, including Reykjavik and Reykanes areas | 2 = 5 - 9 |
| | | 3 = 10 – 99 |
| | | 4 = 100 - 999 |
| | | 5 = 1,000 – 9,999 |
| | | 6 = 10,000+ |

The sequence and nomenclature of this list follow Collins Bird Guide 2nd Edition 2010.

| Species | Number of days recorded | Locations | Abundance Scale | Scientific name |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Whooper Swan | 10 | S A H | 4 | <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> |
| Pink-footed Goose | 2 | A | 3 | <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i> |
| Greylag Goose | 10 | S A H | 4 | <i>Anser anser</i> |
| Brent Goose | 2 | S | 1 | <i>Branta bernicla</i> |
| Common Shelduck | 1 | >S | 1 | <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> |
| Eurasian Wigeon | 7 | S A H | 3 | <i>Anas penelope</i> |
| Gadwall | 1 | A | 3 | <i>Anas strepera</i> |
| Common Teal | 6 | S A | 3 | <i>Anas crecca</i> |
| Mallard | 10 | S A H | 3 | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> |
| Northern Pintail | 2 | A | 1 | <i>Anas acuta</i> |
| Greater Scaup | 7 | S A H | 3 | <i>Aythya marila</i> |
| Tufted Duck | 9 | S A H | 4 | <i>Aythya fuligula</i> |
| Ring-necked Duck | 1 | H | 1 | <i>Aythya collaris</i> |
| Common Eider | 10 | S A H | 6 | <i>Somateria mollissima</i> |
| King Eider | 1 | S | 1 | <i>Somateria spectabilis</i> |
| Harlequin Duck | 6 | S A | 3 | <i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i> |
| Common Scoter | 1 | A | 3 | <i>Melanitta nigra</i> |
| Long-tailed Duck | 2 | A H | 3 | <i>Clangula hyemalis</i> |
| Barrow's Goldeneye | 2 | A H | 4 | <i>Bucephala islandica</i> |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 9 | S A H | 3 | <i>Mergus serrator</i> |
| Goosander | 2 | A | 2 | <i>Mergus merganser</i> |
| Rock Ptarmigan | 4 | S A | 3 | <i>Lagopus muta islandorum</i> |
| Red-throated Loon (Diver) | 3 | S H | 2 | <i>Gavia stellata</i> |
| Great Northern Loon (Diver) | 7 | S A H | 1 | <i>Gavia immer</i> |
| Slavonian Grebe | 5 | S A H | 3 | <i>Podiceps auritus</i> |
| Northern Fulmar | 10 | S A H | 6 | <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> |
| Manx Shearwater | 1 | H | 1 | <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> |
| Northern Gannet | 4 | S H | 3 | <i>Sula bassanus</i> |
| Great Cormorant | 9 | S A H | 2 | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> |
| European Shag | 4 | S H | 3 | <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> |
| White-tailed Eagle | 3 | S | 1 | <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i> |
| Merlin | 2 | A | 1 | <i>Falco columbarius</i> |
| Gyr Falcon | 1 | A | 1 | <i>Falco rusticolus</i> |
| Eurasian Oystercatcher | 10 | S A H | 4 | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> |
| Common Ringed Plover | 8 | S A H | 3 | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> |
| European Golden Plover | 10 | S A H | 4 | <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> |
| Red Knot | 3 | S | 2 | <i>Calidris canutus</i> |
| Sanderling | 3 | S A | 3 | <i>Calidris alba</i> |
| Purple Sandpiper | 3 | S A | 2 | <i>Calidris maritime</i> |
| Ruddy Turnstone | 4 | S H | 3 | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> |
| Dunlin | 8 | S A H | 3 | <i>Calidris alpina</i> |
| Common Redshank | 10 | S A H | 3 | <i>Tringa tetanus</i> |
| Black-tailed Godwit | 9 | S A H | 3 | <i>Limosa limosa</i> |
| Whimbrel | 10 | S A H | 3 | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> |
| Red-necked Phalarope | 7 | S A H | 3 | <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i> |
| Common Snipe | 9 | S A H | 3 | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|----|---|---|---|---|
| Great Skua | 2 | | | H | 3 | <i>Stercorarius skua</i> |
| Arctic Skua | 10 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> |
| Black-headed Gull | 10 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Larus ridibundus</i> |
| Common Gull | 7 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Larus canus</i> |
| European Herring Gull | 7 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Larus argentatus</i> |
| Great Black-backed Gull | 9 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Larus marinus</i> |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | 8 | S | A | H | 4 | <i>Larus fuscus</i> |
| Glaucous Gull | 5 | S | A | | 4 | <i>Larus hyperboreus</i> |
| Iceland Gull | 2 | S | | | 1 | <i>Larus glaucooides</i> |
| Kumlien's Gull | 1 | | A | | 1 | <i>Larus(glaucooides) kumlieni</i> |
| Black-legged Kittiwake | 6 | S | | H | 5 | <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> |
| Arctic Tern | 10 | S | A | H | 5 | <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> |
| Black Guillemot | 4 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Cepphus grille</i> |
| Atlantic Puffin | 5 | S | A | H | 5 | <i>Fratercula arctica</i> |
| Common Guillemot | 4 | S | A | H | 4 | <i>Uria aalge</i> |
| Brünnich's Guillemot | 1 | S | | | 3 | <i>Uria lomvia</i> |
| Razorbill | 3 | S | | H | 3 | <i>Alca torda</i> |
| Rock Dove (<i>introduced</i>) | 2 | S | | H | 3 | <i>Columbia livia</i> |
| Short-eared Owl | 3 | | A | H | 1 | <i>Asio flammeus</i> |
| Barn Swallow | 1 | S | | | 1 | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> |
| Meadow Pipit | 10 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> |
| White Wagtail | 10 | S | A | H | 2 | <i>Motacilla alba</i> |
| Northern Wheatear | 6 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> |
| Redwing | 10 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Turdus iliacus</i> |
| Blackbird | 2 | | | H | 1 | <i>Turdus merula</i> |
| Winter Wren | 1 | | A | | 1 | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes islandicus</i> |
| Common Raven | 10 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Corvus corax</i> |
| Common Starling | 8 | S | A | H | 3 | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> |
| Common Redpoll | 5 | 1h | A | H | 3 | <i>Carduelis flammea islandica</i> |
| Snow Bunting | 6 | S | A | H | 2 | <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i> |
| MAMMALS | | | | | | |
| Minke Whale | 1 | | | H | 1 | <i>Baleenoptera acutorostrata</i> |
| Harbour (Common) Porpoise | 1 | | A | | 1 | <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> |
| Grey Seal | 2 | S | | H | 2 | <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> |
| Common Seal | 5 | S | | H | 3 | <i>Phoca vitulina</i> |

MOTHS - Netted Mountain Moth *Macaria carbonaria* Quite common and widespread. Others seen, but no i.d.

PLANTS

We tried to record as many species of flowering plants as possible, but to i.d. every grass and sedge would have been too time consuming. Some species were added after being identified later from photos and might not have been seen by party members. Some species were not found in flower. Apologies for any omissions.

* indicates that species does not occur in British Isles.

Clubmoss family

Lycopodiaceae

Fir Clubmoss
Lesser Clubmoss

Huperzia selago
Selaginella selaginoides

Horsetail family

Equisetaceae

Field Horsetail
Marsh Horsetail

Equisetum arvense
Equisetum palustre

Fern family

Polypodiaceae

Brittle Bladder-fern

Cystopteris fragilis

Adder's Tongue family

Ophioglossaceae

Moonwort

Botrichium lunaria

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Conifer family | <i>Cupressaceae</i> Juniper | <i>Juniperus communis</i> |
| Buttercup family | <i>Ranunculaceae</i> Marsh Marigold Meadow Buttercup Creeping Buttercup | <i>Caltha palustris</i> <i>Ranunculus acris</i> <i>R. repens</i> |
| Poppy family | <i>Papaveraceae</i> Arctic Poppy* | <i>Papaver radicum</i> |
| Stinging Nettle family | <i>Urticaceae</i> Common Nettle | <i>Urtica dioica</i> |
| Birch family | <i>Betulaceae</i> Downy Birch Dwarf Birch | <i>Betula pubescens</i> <i>B. nana</i> |
| Goosefoot family | <i>Chenopodiaceae</i> Babington's Orache | <i>Atriplex glabruscula</i> |
| Pink family | <i>Caryophyllaceae</i> Arctic Sandwort Sea Sandwort Mountain Sandwort Common Chickweed Alpine Mouse-ear Arctic Mouse-ear Common Mouse-ear Starwort Mouse-ear Alpine Pearlwort Sea Campion Moss Campion Red Campion | <i>Arenaria norvegica</i> <i>Honckenya peploides</i> <i>Minuartia rubella</i> <i>Stellaria media</i> <i>Cerastium alpinum</i> <i>C. arcticum</i> <i>C. fontanum</i> <i>C. cerastoides</i> <i>Sagina saginoides</i> <i>Silene uniflora</i> <i>S. acaulis</i> <i>S. dioica</i> |
| Dock family | <i>Polygonaceae</i> Sheep's Sorrel Common Sorrel Northern Dock | <i>Rumex acetosella</i> <i>R. acetosa</i> <i>R. longifolius</i> |
| Sealavender family | <i>Plumbaginaceae</i> Thrift | <i>Armeria maritime</i> |
| Violet family | <i>Violaceae</i> Heath Dog-Violet Wild Pansy | <i>Viola canina</i> <i>V. tricolor</i> |
| Willow family | <i>Salicaceae</i> Tea-leaved Willow Woolly Willow Dwarf Willow Blueish Willow* | <i>Salix phylicifolia</i> <i>S. lanata</i> <i>S. hebecae</i> <i>S. glauca</i> |
| Mustard family | <i>Brassicaceae</i> Lady's Smock Northern Rockcress Hoary Whitlow-grass Snow Whitlow-grass* Common Scurvygrass Shepherd's Purse Northern Sea Rocket* | <i>Cardamine pratensis</i> <i>Cardaminopsis (Arabis) petraea</i> <i>Draba incana</i> <i>Draba nivalis</i> <i>Cochlearia officinalis</i> <i>Capsella bursa-pastoros</i> <i>Cakile (edentula) arctica</i> |

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|---------------------------|--|---|
| Heather family | <i>Ericaceae</i> Trailing Azalea Ling Bearberry Northern (Bog) Bilberry Cassiope* | <i>Loiseleuria procumbens</i> <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> <i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i> <i>Vaccinium uliginosum</i> <i>Cassiope hypnoides</i> |
| Stonecrop family | <i>Crassulaceae</i> Roseroot | <i>Rhodiola rosea</i> |
| Saxifrage family | <i>Saxifragaceae</i> Tufted Saxifrage | <i>S. cespitosa</i> |
| Rose family | <i>Rosaceae</i> Stone Bramble Silverweed Alpine Cinquefoil Water Avens Mountain Avens Alpine Lady's-mantle Common Lady's-mantle Rowan | <i>Rubus saxatilis</i> <i>P. anserine</i> <i>P. crantzii</i> <i>Geum rivale</i> <i>Dryas octopetala</i> <i>Alchemilla alpine</i> <i>A. glomerulans</i> <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> |
| Pea family | <i>Fabaceae</i> Kidney Vetch Sea Pea White Clover Nootka Lupine | <i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i> <i>Lathyrus japonicus</i> <i>Trifolium repens</i> <i>Lupinus nootkatensis</i> |
| Geranium family | <i>Geraniceae</i> Wood Crane's-bill | <i>Geranium sylvaticum</i> |
| Cow Parsley family | <i>Apiaceae (Umbelliferae)</i> Cow Parsley Sweet Cicely Garden Angelica* | <i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i> <i>Myrrhis odorata</i> <i>A. archangelica</i> |
| Borage family | <i>Boraginaceae</i> Oysterplant Field Forget-me-not | <i>Mertensia maritime</i> <i>Myosotis arvensis</i> |
| Mint family | <i>Lamiaceae (Labiatae)</i> Wild Thyme | <i>Thymus praecox</i> |
| Plantain family | <i>Plantaginaceae</i> Sea Plantain | <i>Plantago maritime</i> |
| Figwort family | <i>Scrophulariaceae</i> Thyme-leaved Speedwell Alpine Bartsia Yellow Rattle | <i>Veronica serpyllifolia</i> <i>Bartsia alpine</i> <i>Rhinanthus minor</i> |
| Butterwort family | <i>Lentibulariaceae</i> Common Butterwort | <i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i> |
| Madder family | <i>Rubiaceae</i> Northern Bedstraw Lady's Bedstraw Slender Bedstraw* | <i>Galium boreale</i> <i>G. vernum</i> <i>G. normanii</i> |
| Aster family | <i>Asteraceae (Compositae)</i> Dandelion | <i>Taraxacum spp.</i> |

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Yarrow | <i>Achillea millefolium</i> |
| | Daisy | <i>Bellis perenis</i> |
| | Sea Mayweed | <i>Tripleurosperium maritimum</i> |
| Rush family | <i>Junacaceae</i> | |
| | Three-leaved Rush | <i>Juncus trifidus</i> |
| | Heath Woodrush | <i>Luzula sylvatica</i> |
| Sedge family | <i>Cyperaceae</i> | |
| | Sedge – various, but not i.d. | <i>Carex spp.</i> |
| | Cotton-grass sp | <i>Eriophorum sp</i> |
| Grass family (no attempt to i.d. all grasses was made) | <i>Poaceae</i> | |
| | Lyme Grass | <i>Leymus arenarius</i> |
| Lily family | <i>Liliaceae</i> | |
| | Scottish Asphodel | <i>Tofieldia pusilla</i> |
| | Herb Paris | <i>Paris quadrifolia</i> |

References

- Kent, D.H. *List of Vascular Plants of the British Isles.*
Hörður Kristinsson *Flowering Plants and Ferns of Iceland*
Blamey, M. and Grey-Wilson, C. *The Illustrated Flora of Britain and Northern Europe*

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.



Harlequin Ducks



Barrow's Goldeneye



Slavonian Grebe



Glaucous Gull



Red-necked Phalarope



European Golden Plover



Atlantic Puffins



Arctic Tern

Cover photograph: Gulfoss

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