

ORNITHOLIDAY'S TOUR TO ICELAND
Land of Ice and Fire

29 May – 05 June 2013



Leaders: Andy Jones and Paul Rogers

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A Personal Diary

Wednesday 29th May

On a rainy day at Heathrow's Terminal 1 the check-in at Icelandair is early, fast and efficient. Soon we are meeting our fellow travellers and depart on time for the two and a half hour flight to Keflavik. Here the skies are cloudy and the temperature a cool 8°C. Immigration and customs are cleared with a minimum of fuss and we are soon collecting our bags at the carousel. Andy our guide, driver and mentor for the next few days is waiting for us and after changing a little money (the rate here is better than in the UK), we head across the flat larva fields to the southern side of the Reykjanes peninsula.

In no time we are passing the first Golden Plovers in smart breeding plumage and flocks of Whooper Swans in the green fields, unlike the plovers these will be non-breeding birds. The brisk chilly wind keeps us inside the comfortable mini-bus, we have yet to don our extra layers and thermals. The estuary of the River Olfusa is a favoured wintering area for wildfowl and with a very late spring we hope for a variety of species. Common Eider are present in good numbers but soon we pick out Tufted Duck and Greater Scaup, how nice to see them side by side and so close. Greylag Geese and Mallard wade in the shallows but several Long-tailed Ducks prefer the deeper waters, including a splendid male. Newly arrived Arctic Terns are harassed by Arctic Skuas, they will be a constant threat to them throughout the summer.

On the water nearer the Atlantic Ocean is a pair of Common Shelduck, not a common breeding bird here and an even more unusual immature Little Gull is amongst the Black-headed Gulls. On the stony banks of the river are Dunlin, Common Ringed Plovers and Sanderling in breeding plumage, much smarter than the almost white ones we see in winter, they will soon be heading further north.

Further east is the small settlement of Selvagor, here the picturesque church is receiving a fresh coat of paint in preparation for Seaman's Day on Sunday. Selvagur, means "Seal Bay" and from the top of the sea wall we watch a group of a dozen Atlantic Grey Seals loafing on the rocks. Picking amongst seaweed are groups of Ruddy Turnstones, in tortoiseshell breeding plumage, plainer Purple Sandpipers, not at all purple, and a few Red Knot.

All too soon it is time to head for Skálholt. Our hotel is by the side of the modern cathedral, consecrated in 1963, this is the birthplace of Christianity in Iceland and holds pride and place in its religious history. Our rooms are modern and comfortable with boiling hot water supplied from a local hot spring. We are all ready for dinner and the meal of local trout is a big hit.

After dinner most of us take the opportunity to stretch our legs, enjoy the scenery and the birds. In the fields are Whooper Swans and Black-tailed Godwits, Common Snipe drum above us and European Golden Plovers display with slow lazy wing beats. Inside the modern cathedral a choir is practising, adding a magical atmosphere to the serene surroundings. The late evening light brightens up the stained glass windows and sparkles on the impressive mosaic above the altar. Although we have only lost an hour, we are ready for bed and only the constant "daylight" may keep us awake.

Thursday 30th May

We awake to dark overcast skies that soon deliver rain, not the start we hoped for. After breakfast we prepare our own sandwiches for a picnic lunch and leave at 9am, a nice gentle start. The river close by is our first stop, here is a small group of Red-necked Phalaropes. A bridge over the river offers some shelter from the rain as we watch these delightful waders. The group is made up of colourful females and the duller males, this species exhibits reversed sexual dimorphism, the birds are recent arrivals and have yet to move onto their breeding territories. They are one of the delights of bird watching in Iceland in early summer.

At Laugarvatn, "Wash Lake", no need for a wash in this weather, we scan the choppy waters. Tufted Ducks mingle with a group of Greater Scaup and Redwings search for worms in the short grass. It is a short journey to Þingvellir National Park, the information centre here gives us the chance to glean some information about the area's geology and use the facilities. Outside a White Wagtail, Redwings and a Northern Wheatear hop near the car park.

We are at the point where the North American and European tectonic plates meet. It is a most active zone with the plates slowly moving apart and "no-man's land" between them. It is also important historically as the Viking Parliament met here. The rain stops and we take the opportunity to walk in this magical place. At the start of our walk an Arctic Skua searches the long grass for a possible nest, much to the consternation of a Black-headed Gull and a Whimbrel. A steep path takes us to the Óxará Waterfall. The steep cliffs are full of cracks and crevices, this is the habitat of Winter Wren, hence the Latin name *Troglodytes*, "cave dweller". A singing bird will reveal its whereabouts but on a dull day there is no song and no sighting. Roseroot and Tufted Saxifrage cling to the cliff and Alpine Ladies Mantle clothe the edges of the path.

On the way to the Law Rock, the seat of the Viking Parliament and positioned on the edge of the Great Atlantic Rift, we have close views of a male Common Redpoll perched in a Dwarf Birch. However, the real star is a male Harlequin Duck sitting on a rock at the foot of a small waterfall. Even in the poor light it is a wonderful sight of a North American species and only found here in the Western Palearctic. We appreciate its superb plumage, hopefully the photographs will do it justice.

We eat our picnic in a sheltered hollow on the northern edge of Iceland's largest lake, Þingvellirvatn. Common Snipe drum constantly overhead and Redwings sing from the tops of stunted shrubs. As often happens lunch is interrupted by a bird, this time it is a Great Northern Diver close to the shore, nearby is a second bird on a nest on a small grassy island. We have great views through the telescopes of a special species that only breeds regularly here, with a very few records elsewhere in Europe. It is another notable sighting.

After lunch we head down the eastern side of the lake, to find our second diver, a Red-throated and again we find a bird on a nest. As divers have legs towards the back of their bodies they nest on the edge of islands so they can slide easily into the water. Red-throated Divers nest on small lakes as they fly to the sea to feed but Great Northern Divers feed in the larger lakes. A close European Golden Plover its black belly contrasting with the grey moss is a wonderful sight. Unfortunately the view from the top of the ridge is foreshortened by low cloud but it is still inspiring to think that we are looking across the meeting of two continents.

Next we start our quest for another speciality Barrow's Goldeneye, another North American species and high on peoples wants list. On the river that enters the lake we find many Tufted Ducks, Greater Scaup, Harlequin Ducks and another pair of nesting Great Northern Divers. A change of location brings about a change of luck, in the fast flowing river that empties into the lake are good numbers of Common Eider, unusual in fresh water, many Harlequin Ducks and a few distant Barrow's Goldeneye. As we watch more Goldeneye appear and treat us to a flypast only a few metres from our vantage point, overhead are drumming Common Snipe, calling Whimbrel and displaying European Golden Plover. This is Icelandic bird watching at its best.

We are back at the hotel with time to dry off, warm up before another delicious dinner and the completion of the last two days sightings. Hopefully we will see an improvement in the weather tomorrow.

Friday 31st May

Again we wake up to rain and another mixed forecast, consequently we avoid the coast and head inland. The first stop of the day is at a small waterfall on the Laxi River with a salmon ladder, a group of Whooper Swans gently float up stream, how many will breed this year with the very late spring?

Today we visit the thermal area around Geysir, an area that gave the word to the "hot springs world". As we near the area steam clouds fill the cold air but we pause to examine a lake. As usual Common Snipe are active overhead but on the still waters are three Slavonian Grebes. At Geysir light rain falls during our exploration of the thermal areas but it does not deter displaying Snipe and food seeking Redwings. We stay to watch several eruptions of Strokkur, which are preceded by a large blue bubble. The eruptions vary between three to eight minutes but being so close to the gushing noisy hot water is a memorable experience.

From one spectacle we travel to another, one of the world's most spectacular waterfalls at Gullfoss, "the Golden Waterfall". We watch spellbound and are constantly sprayed by the waters of the River Hvítá, "The White River" as it tumbles over the vertical cliffs with great ferocity. Unfortunately the photographers concentrating on f stops and shutter speeds miss a Wood Mouse and a Merlin. The light improves but the sun fails to produce the magical light that gives the falls its name and attracts hundreds of visitors.

To the east is a major river, the Þjórsá, draining the interior of the island and an important migration route for Pink-footed Geese. Hopefully, there are still some late migrants making their way onto their breeding grounds. Over 90% of the world's population breed in Iceland, the breeding grounds were discovered by Peter Scott and James Fisher after a long arduous journey on the backs of the hardy Icelandic Horses. Close Harlequin Ducks bring us to an abrupt stop to the delight of the photographers. Andy hears the call of a Gyr Falcon but despite diligent searching of the vertical cliffs we can only locate an occupied Common Raven's nest, Iceland's only Corvid.

Lunch is by an ancient sheep-pen used only once a year when the animals are apportioned to their rightful owners. A lengthy dirt track takes us to Stöng, where an ancient Viking farm was covered by tephra from an eruption of Hekla in 1082. This is perhaps Iceland's most famous volcano and is due to erupt in the not too distant future. Today the volcano is covered in cloud and we can only see the snow covered lower slopes. In 1939 a Danish group of archaeologists uncovered the walls and lower structures of this important settlement. After a little culture we walk through an Icelandic wood of Birch trees. It as it would have been in the days of the Vikings, but now only present in a few areas. A path through the stunted trees leads us to the Gjái Gorge, was the river here the source for the Vikings water? Clear cold water tumbles over vivid green moss covered rocks into deep crystal clear waters. Below us are pairs of displaying Harlequin Ducks, visible as they dive under the still waters. It is truly a magical place and one that has probably not changed dramatically over the last thousand years.

As we reach the vehicle the rain returns and we return to base in heavy rain with time to relax before another delicious dinner. Tomorrow we head for the coast and hopefully some sun. Fingers crossed!

Saturday 1st June

The promise of better weather is not obvious when we wake to drizzle but as we head towards the coast the skies brighten. On our journey we pass many of the already familiar waders including Eurasian Oystercatchers nesting by the road and two even mating in the centre of the tarmac. Andy explains the nature of the landscape and the fundamentals of the area's geology during our journey.

By the time we reach Seljalandsfoss blue sky greets us and the sun breaks through as we walk beneath the vertical cliffs. Northern Fulmars appear to occupy every available ledge and a pigeon shows all the characteristics of a true Rock Dove. As we search for Winter Wren all the birds take to the air, soon the reason for the panic is located, a Merlin hunting high above the cliffs. A second bird appears and the pair defends a territory chasing off every intruder that venture near their own patch of rocks. Try as we may we cannot locate the larger Icelandic race of Winter Wren, although a few of the group do hear a snatch of song. Maybe the small falcons have made them even more wary than usual. Nevertheless we enjoy the superb scenery and the spectacular waterfall.

A few kilometres further on is the town of Holtsós which along with neighbouring farmland was badly affected in April 2010 by the eruptions of the volcano Eyjafjallajökull, Andy attempts to teach us the correct pronunciation, roughly AY-UH-FYAT-LUK-YOE-KUUTL. Considering the eruption was only just over three years ago there is little evidence of the huge fall out of black ash, except for that in a container for visitors to take as a souvenir.

The road up the valley to glacial tongue of Sólheimajökull is a little rough but busy with tourists, glacier walking has become a popular pastime. Andy again explains glacier formation before we walk to the wall of ice that is retreating annually. It is almost a surreal landscape that brings to "life" all the things we have read about in school text books. We picnic within sight of the glacier in dry and bright conditions, a real privilege. At Vík we take a coffee break and visit one of the wool factories before heading for the beach sheltered by huge cliffs. A Barn Swallow in the centre of town is a good record this far north, we wonder whether it will

ever make it back to Africa. The top of the stony beach offers a good vantage point, above us circle large numbers of Northern Fulmars and Black-legged Kittiwakes but it is the birds on the sea that provide most interest. Soo is delighted to see her first ever Atlantic Puffins, a bird that is always pleasing to find and here there are large numbers sitting in groups on the choppy sea. Other auks, Common Guillemots and Razorbills are in smaller numbers. Arctic Terns from the large colony on the outskirts of the settlement dive for fish and then try to avoid the piratical activities of several Great Skuas. On the western side of the headland are a number of sea stacks but it is the columnar basalt at the edge of the black stony beach that is the most impressive. Thank goodness for large memory cards, enough films for this location would cost a fortune.

One last stop is at the 60 metre high waterfall of Skógarfoss, legend has it that the first settler here, Þrasi, hid a treasure chest behind the tumbling torrent. We have no time to look for it today but just time for more photographs. It is our last night in the delightful setting at Skálholt and we are treated to a superb dinner of local lamb, cooked in a traditional manner from a recipe handed down to the chef by her grandmother.

Sunday 2nd June

We say farewell to Skálholt and its comfortable guest house on a morning that promises better weather and head eventually to the Snæfellsnes peninsula with a few stops on the way.

The crater at Kerid is only a short distance away and further evidence of the effects of volcanic activity that has shaped the landscape. Yet again Common Snipe constantly display and drum above us, one of the delights of a visit to Iceland. The small town of Hveragerði has grown up around hot springs, such a natural wonder in the middle of a residential area is rare. A powerful earthquake in 2008 underlined the fragility of the area and created a new hot spring zone above the town. Here steam seeped from the hillsides and provides unusual hazards on the local golf course. Heading north we skirt the outskirts of the capital Reykjavík, stopping for a coffee before travelling along the southern edge of Hvalfjörður.

A surprise is the sight of more than 150 Pale-bellied Brent Geese feeding in a field, normally they would be on their breeding grounds in Canada by now but the very late cold spring has delayed their long journey. A lay-by allows safe viewing over the deep fjord surrounded by sweeping snow covered mountains. Purple Sandpipers pick amongst the seaweed and flocks of Common Eider rest on the shingle, Black Guillemots favour the deeper waters. It is the deepness of the waters that made this area an important refuge for the North Atlantic Fleet.

Lunch is taken at an idyllic spot on the northern coast. As we eat Common Snipe are drumming and displaying, one even lands on the roof of a chalet, Redwing are feeding young, Black-tailed Godwits are calling and a Meadow Pipit parachutes to the ground. Paul S finds a male Rock Ptarmigan on the rocks near the shore to bring our refreshing break to an end. Borgarnes is the last large settlement before we travel to the wonderful Snæfellsnes peninsula; here we make a stop at the delightful bay at Breiðavík. The sweeping bay backed by snow-covered mountains bathed in sunshine is a stunning landscape. A pair of Red-necked Phalaropes on a reed-fringed pool is unfazed by our presence and the photographers are delighted with frame filling shots of these splendid waders.

From the edge of the shore we watch birds at close range, Sanderlings and Red Knot are in their breeding finery and now we know why they are called Red Knot. Purple Sandpipers and Greater Ringed Plovers scuttle along the sandy shore. At a safer distance both Grey and Common Seals loaf on the rocks. As we watch a flock of Pale-bellied Brent Geese fly westwards.

Leaving this delightful location we cross the peninsula through more areas of volcanic activity. As we reach a shallow bay at the southern end of Breiðafjörður Catherine spots two large birds above the distant cliffs. From a safe pull-in we watch a pair of adult White-tailed Eagles; the huge raptors dwarf several Common Ravens mobbing them. It is amazing the difference in size, as we watch the anchor shape of a Gyr Falcon briefly joins the posse, but the sighting is all too brief. A bridge takes us over an inlet of the fjord, here are an amazing number of birds, the Herring shoals are still in the bay, a late bonanza for the birds. From a rocky causeway we have amazing views, Northern Fulmars glide by on stiff wings but it is the Northern Gannets that are the stars. They fly only a few metres from us before plunging at high speed into the midst of the shoal. The photographers have unique opportunities to capture the birds diving into the waters against a blue sky. The challenge to catch the birds plunging with wings folded back results in many images of superb

splashes and no birds. An Atlantic Grey Seal swims on the edge of the mêlée and a pod of forty of more Harbour Porpoises drive the mass of fish into the shallower waters. It is a wonderful experience, the sheer number of birds and the close proximity of a species normally seen at a distance is one that will stay in our memories for a long time.

Fortunately our hotel in Grundarfjörður is only a few kilometres away. All the fishing boats are in the harbour as it is Seaman's Sunday but large numbers of Glaucous Gulls still hope for an easy meal. Our evening meal is a little late thanks to the Northern Gannets but it is well worth the wait. It is a great end to a wonderful day in beautiful weather.

Monday 3rd June

Yesterday's fine weather is now a brief memory as we wake to rain and very strong winds and a dismal forecast for the rest of the day. Unperturbed we head off westwards, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Harlequins and a Long-tailed Ducks fight the elements on a small lake at the foot of Kirkufell, "Church Mountain", that is topped by low cloud. A flock of gulls are settled on a grassy field, the majority are Glaucous with a few Lesser Black-backed and two immature Iceland Gulls. Although called Iceland they breed in Greenland and are found here in the winter, only a few non-breeding birds remain in the summer, so this is a rewarding find. Their smaller size, rounded foreheads and longer wings are clearly visible through the rain spattered windows. Gusts of winds up to Gale Force 8 make driving difficult but Andy does an excellent job.

A coffee break in Ólafsvík is most welcome, the town has developed around a safe harbour and rich fishing grounds but today fishing boats are all in the harbour because of the strong winds. On the edge of Rif is one of Iceland's largest Arctic Tern colonies even these masters of flight find the conditions difficult and find shelter behind tussocks of grass. The Common Eider on islands of a large pond have plenty of shelter, their main concern is a marauding light morph Arctic Tern. The ducks are "farmed" for their down and an important source of income, although cleaning the feathers by hand is a costly and time consuming exercise and the demand for such an expensive commodity has fallen.

The good folk of Rík have provided a shelter overlooking a large lake, swollen by the heavy rain, although it is a blind rather than a hide it does offer some respite from the driving rain. Red-necked Phalaropes bob like small red corks on the turbulent water, Greylag Geese, Common Eiders, Greater Scaup and Tufted Ducks handled the conditions much better. A surprise is 10 Barnacle Geese, their migration to Greenland has been brought to a temporary halt.

The historic church at Ingaldshólskirkja, is believed to be the oldest concrete church in the world, built in 1903, this area was visited by Christopher Columbus in 1477, fifteen years before he discovered America. Huddled behind the solid walls we scan the open fields and ponds, Black-tailed Godwits and displaying Common Snipe, as usual are constant companions. Andy utters squeals of delight when he finds a rare visitor, a Canada Goose, has it arrived from North America or Europe? It is a very rare find and a sighting that will reach the pages of Iceland's Bird Alert.

The cliffs near Hellissandur provide safe nesting ledges for large numbers of auks and Kittiwakes. Peering carefully over the cliffs we see the nesting birds below us, fortunately at close range is a Common Guillemot, of the bridled morph, and a pair of Brünnich's Guillemots, named after a Danish zoologist. The thick bill with a white gape stripe is clear to see, here it is on the southern edge of its breeding range. We are fortunate to have such good views of another of the country's specialities and a new species for most of the group. The cliffs are a good vantage point for spotting cetaceans, particularly Orcas, but the high waves and poor visibility thwart our efforts. Some compensation is a pair of Snow Buntings creeping amongst the black lava. Lunch is taken on the edge of the lava in the shelter of the bus as more Snow Buntings flash past like wind-driven snowflakes. An appropriate dessert in this location is Lava Bites - chocolate covered cereal snacks.

The low cloud obliterates the superb scenery, the Snæfellsjökull Glacier only appears in our imagination, as we travel to the most western part of the island. The rain eases as we walk down a sheltered valley at to the sea at Dritvík. Four rocks of different sizes are mentioned in folk tales when fisherman tested their strength. It is hard to imagine that this rugged cove was one of the largest fishing centres in Iceland with 60 trawlers and up 600 workers and fisherman living here. The challenges they faced are underlined when we see pieces

of metal strewn across the black beach, the remains of Eding, a Grimsby based trawler that sunk on March 13th 1948, when only four of the crew survived.

The National Park's Information Centre at Hellnar gives us an insight into the area from the geology to the life and times of the local fisher folk. Our last port of call is literally that, the delightful harbour of Arnarstapi. A wooden viewing deck looks over an impressive stack dotted with pairs of Northern Fulmars and Black-legged Kittiwakes, Black Guillemots and Harlequin Ducks sit on the still surface. A group of Common Eiders crossing the road provides a comical sight.

Our last sighting is that of an Arctic Fox crossing the road, it is very wary and heads off at speed up a rock strewn valley and out of sight. We are back in good time to dry out, warm up and enjoy dinner, considering the conditions it has been a most rewarding day.

Tuesday 4th June

The dreadful conditions continue with little hope for any immediate change. Unperturbed we head eastwards and stop to see a huge block lava field covered in a thick soft carpet of *Racomitrium languginosum* moss. This species is an important pioneer species on new lava. Redwings seem to have colonised every habitat and this apparently harsh environment is no exception.

We check an area of the coast that is good for White-tailed Eagles but poor visibility means we have little chance of locating the raptor, despite its huge size. A small pool with well-vegetated islands looks an ideal place for Red-throated Divers and sure enough we find a sitting bird on a nest but there is no sign of a second bird. A coffee stop seems a good idea at Stykkishólmur before we visit the middle of this picturesque town with traditional houses and fine harbour and a ferry to Flateyri Island. Several vehicles are boarding the boat, we do not envy their rock and roll journey, and the chances of our schedule boat trip look very slim but may be things will be quieter this evening.

A small conifer plantation is worth a final try for the elusive Wren. The stiller conditions amongst the trees raises our hopes but there are only lots of Redwings with beaks full of worms and many Common Redpolls perching on the very tops of the pines. A large lake nestles beneath the slopes of a low basalt mountain, Helgafell, "Holy Mountain". This is the chosen nesting place for another pair of Great Northern Divers, again with a bird on a nest. This area features strongly in Icelandic folklore and has breathtaking panoramic views but only on a clear day.

Andy has arranged lunch back at the hotel and the hot tasty soup is very much appreciated. Revived we brave the elements once more, viewing is going to be mainly from the vehicle. Checking a group of gulls we are surprised to see two extremely close Great Northern Divers. Constantly changing seats and opening doors the group has wonderful views of these majestic birds. I am sure the photographs will show the falling rain on dull grey waters with two black and white birds, sounds dull but it is far from it and illustrates that even in bad weather there are often unexpected highlights.

Perhaps our good fortune will continue as we search for whales from the high cliffs but it is not to be. Instead we have to settle for views of all Iceland's breeding auks and Arctic Terns been chased by Arctic Skuas. There are fewer seabirds associated with the herring shoal in the late afternoon and we cannot manage to find eagles or falcons.

Dinner is fish, cod, which must be as fresh as it can be. Unfortunately the sightseeing boats are confined to harbour and our chance of close encounters with Atlantic Puffins and dolphins disappears. These last two days have been two of the most challenging I have experienced on any tour and I feel sorry that we have not been able to see the wonderful scenery in this part of the world.

Wednesday 5th June

It is still raining as we pack up and head back towards Reykjavik. Andy takes us on a guided tour of the city, home to 120,000 of the countries 320,000 population. We stop to admire the stainless steel sculpture Solfar, "Sun Voyager" created by Árnason in 1986. This impressive monument seems to capture the spirit of this charming capital, a mixture of traditional and modern. We take the opportunity to stretch our legs around

Tjörnin, “The Pond” in the centre of the city. On the waters are some of the species we have enjoyed over the last few days including Arctic Terns and a confiding Whooper Swan.

At last the rain stops and the old Garðskagir lighthouse built in 1897 offers some protection from the stiff wind as we enjoy our last picnic lunch. Fittingly the lighthouse was until recently used as a centre for studying migrating birds and it is here we enjoy our last spell of bird watching. On the shore are Common Ringed Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderling and a Northern Wheatear. Groups of male Common Eider display, chase and “coo” around an unattached female, those females with black fluffy ducklings receive no such attention. One last new sighting for the tour is Manx Shearwater, just when we think that this a fitting end Raymond shouts “Dolphins”. A pod of these cetaceans move slowly off the point, the most northerly on the peninsula, the long curved dorsal fins identify this species as White-beaked Dolphins, a species confined to the colder waters of the North Atlantic. This is a fitting end.

We arrive at the airport in good time to check in and say some farewells, to Andy, Chris and myself as we are staying on for a few days with Andy and his wife.

Acknowledgements

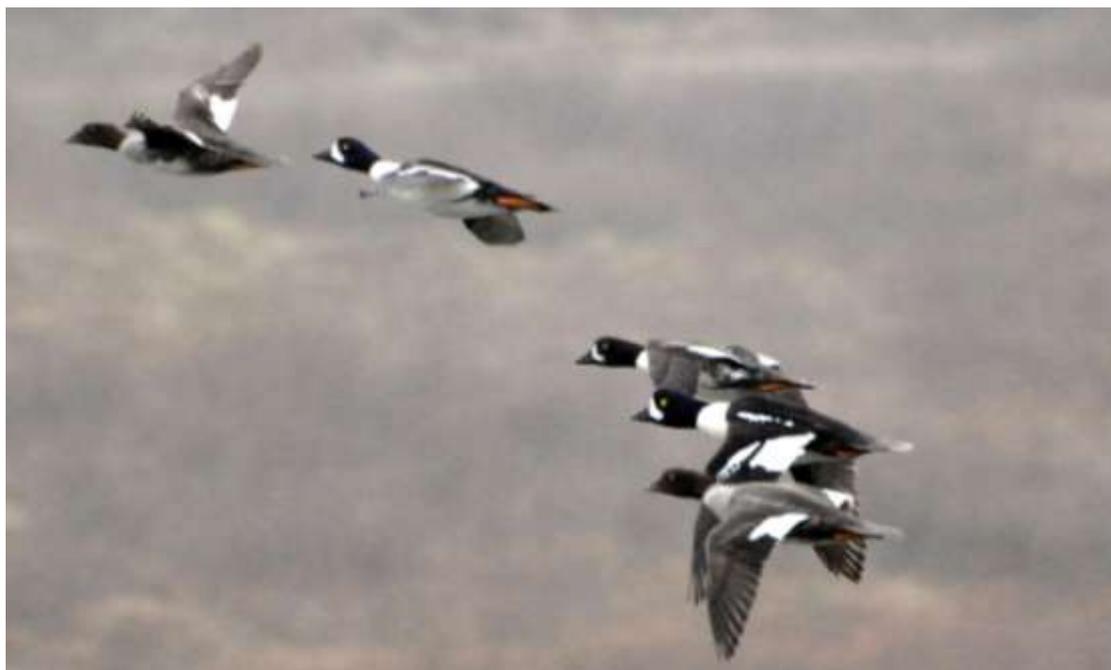
Huge thanks must go to Andy for his careful driving, meticulous planning and sharing his encyclopaedic knowledge of his adopted country. His good humour and attention to detail ensured that we all enjoyed all aspects of Iceland. I would also like to thank you all for your punctuality, good humour and understanding when conditions were very unhelpful, you all made the most of everyday.

I am sure like me you will have many memories of the tour from waterfalls to waders and geysers to gulls. Hopefully we will meet again and share some of these memories. Many thanks for travelling with us.

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August 2013

**Barrow's
Goldeneye
in flight**



Itinerary and Weather

- 29th May International flight from London Heathrow to Keflavic, Iceland – Grindavík – Selvagur – Skálholt.
Overcast but dry max temp 8°C
- 30th May Skálholt – Bruara – Þingellir – Þingelliavatn – Sogid River
Overcast with periods of light rain & brisk SE wind max temp 12°C
- 31st May Laxi River – Geysir – Gullfoss – Þforsa River – Stöng – Gjárn Gorge
Showers in morning dry in afternoon – light SW wind max temp 12°C
- 1st June Seljalandsfoss – Þorvaldseyri – Sólheimajökull – Vík – Skógafoss
Sunny periods and occasional showers max temp 10°C
- 2nd June Skálholt – Kerid – Hveragerði – Reykjavik – Borgarnes – Breiðavík – Grundarfjörður
Fine and sunny max temp 12°C
- 3rd June Snæfellsnes peninsula – Ólafsvík – Rif – Hellnar – Dritvík – Arnarstapi
Constant rain with winds reaching gale force 8 max, temp 13°C
- 4th June Snæfellsnes – Berserkjahraun lava fields – Stykkishólmur
Constant heavy rain with winds gusting to gale force 8, max temp 12°C
- 5th June Grundarfjörður – Reykjavik – Garður – Keflavic – International flight to LHR
Rain in the morning dry and sunny in afternoon with brisk SE wind, max temp 12°C



Cliffs at Vík

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded

1 2h means seen on 1
day and heard on 2
other days

Abundance Scale (max. seen on 1 day)

1 = 1 – 4 individuals
2 = 5 - 9
3 = 10 - 99
4 = 100 – 999
5 = 1,000+

| SPECIES | No of days recorded | Abundance Scale | SCIENTIFIC NAME |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Whooper Swan | 8 | 4 | <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> |
| Pink-footed Goose | 3 | 4 | <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i> |
| Greylag Goose | 7 | 4 | <i>Anser anser</i> |
| Canada Goose | 1 | 1 | <i>Branta canadensis</i> |
| Barnacle Goose | 1 | 3 | <i>Branta leucopsis</i> |
| Brent Goose | 2 | 4 | <i>Branta bernicla</i> |
| Common Shelduck | 3 | 2 | <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> |
| Mallard | 8 | 3 | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> |
| Eurasian Wigeon | 7 | 3 | <i>Anas penelope</i> |
| Common Teal | 5 | 1 | <i>Anas crecca</i> |
| Greater Scaup | 6 | 3 | <i>Aythya marila</i> |
| Tufted Duck | 8 | 3 | <i>Aythya fuligula</i> |
| Common Eider | 7 | 4 | <i>Somateria mollissima</i> |
| Long-tailed Duck | 2 | 2 | <i>Clangula hyemalis</i> |
| Harlequin Duck | 7 | 3 | <i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i> |
| Barrow's Goldeneye | 1 | 3 | <i>Bucephala islandica</i> |
| Goosander | 2 | 1 | <i>Mergus merganser</i> |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 7 | 2 | <i>Mergus serrator</i> |
| Rock Ptarmigan | 2 | 1 | <i>Lagopus muta</i> |
| Red-throated Diver | 3 | 2 | <i>Gavia stellata</i> |
| Great Northern Diver | 4 | 2 | <i>Gavia immer</i> |
| Slavonian Grebe | 1 | 1 | <i>Podiceps auritus</i> |
| Northern Fulmar | 8 | 5 | <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> |
| Manx Shearwater | 1 | 2 | <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> |
| Northern Gannet | 6 | 5 | <i>Sula bassanus</i> |
| Great Cormorant | 5 | 3 | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> |
| European Shag | 3 | 2 | <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> |
| White-tailed Eagle | 1 | 1 | <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i> |
| Merlin | 2 | 1 | <i>Falco columbarius</i> |
| Gyr Falcon | 1 | 1 | <i>Falco rusticolus</i> |
| Eurasian Oystercatcher | 8 | 3 | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> |
| Common Ringed Plover | 6 | 2 | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> |
| European Golden Plover | 8 | 3 | <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> |
| Red Knot | 2 | 3 | <i>Calidris canutus</i> |
| Sanderling | 3 | 3 | <i>Calidris maritima</i> |
| Purple Sandpiper | 2 | 3 | <i>Calidris maritima</i> |
| Ruddy Turnstone | 5 | 3 | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> |
| Dunlin | 4 | 2 | <i>Calidris alpina</i> |
| Common Redshank | 8 | 3 | <i>Tringa tringa</i> |
| Black-tailed Godwit | 8 | 3 | <i>Limosa limosa</i> |
| Whimbrel | 8 | 3 | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> |
| Red-necked Phalarope | 7 | 3 | <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i> |
| Common Snipe | 8 | 3 | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> |
| Great Skua | 3 | 1 | <i>Stercorarius skua</i> |
| Arctic Skua | 8 | 3 | <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> |
| Black-headed Gull | 8 | 3 | <i>Larus ridibundus</i> |
| Little Gull | 1 | 1 | <i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i> |
| Common Gull | 4 | 1 | <i>Larus canus</i> |
| European Herring Gull | 5 | 2 | <i>Larus argentatus</i> |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | 8 | 4 | <i>Larus fuscus</i> |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|------|---|--------------------------------|
| Greater Black-backed Gull | 6 | 4 | <i>Larus marinus</i> |
| Glaucous Gull | 4 | 3 | <i>Larus hyperboreus</i> |
| Iceland Gull | 2 | 1 | <i>Larus glaucoides</i> |
| Black-legged Kittiwake | 5 | 4 | <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> |
| Arctic Tern | 8 | 5 | <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> |
| Black Guillemot | 3 | 2 | <i>Cephus grylle</i> |
| Atlantic Puffin | 5 | 4 | <i>Fratercula arctica</i> |
| Common Guillemot | 3 | 3 | <i>Uria aalge</i> |
| Brünnich's Guillemot | 1 | 2 | <i>Uria lomvia</i> |
| Razorbill | 5 | 3 | <i>Alca torda</i> |
| Rock Dove | 2 | 1 | <i>Columbia livia</i> |
| Meadow Pipit | 8 | 3 | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> |
| White Wagtail | 8 | 2 | <i>Motacilla alba</i> |
| Northern Wheatear | 7 | 1 | <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> |
| Redwing | 8 | 3 | <i>Turdus iliacus</i> |
| Blackbird | 1 | 1 | <i>Turdus merula</i> |
| Winter Wren | - 1h | 1 | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> |
| Common Raven | 8 | 3 | <i>Corvus corax</i> |
| Barn Swallow | 1 | 1 | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> |
| Common Starling | 8 | 3 | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> |
| Common Redpoll | 4 | 3 | <i>Carduelis flammea</i> |
| Snow Bunting | 1 | 2 | <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i> |

Mammals

| | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| White-beaked Dolphin | 1 | 2 | <i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i> |
| Harbour Porpoise | 1 | 3 | <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> |
| Grey Seal | 3 | 3 | <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> |
| Common Seal | 1 | 1 | <i>Phoca vitulina</i> |
| Arctic Fox | 1 | 1 | <i>Alopex lagopus</i> |
| Wood Mouse | 2 | 1 | <i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i> |



Arctic Tern

Plants

Alpine Cinquefoil
Alpine Lady's-mantle
Alpine Mouse-ear
Annual Meadow-grass
Aspen
Bearberry
Bent Grass
Bilberry
Bluish Willow
Bog Bilberry
Common Lady's-mantle
Common Scurveygrass
Common Sorrel
Cow Parsley
Crowberry
Dandelion
Downy Birch
Dwarf Birch
Dwarf Willow
Field Horsetail
Garden Angelica
Heather (Ling)
Heath Dog-violet
Juniper
Lady Smock
Lyme Grass
Knotted Pearlwort
Marsh Horsetail
Marsh Marigold
Meadow Buttercup
Meadowsweet
Moss Campion
Mossy Saxifrage
Nootka Lupin
Northern Bedstraw
Northern Dock
Northern Rock Cress
Oysterplant
Red Clover
Roseroot
Rowan
Sea Campion
Sea Mayweed
Sea Sandwort
Scented Mayweed
Sheep's Sorrel
Silverweed
Tea-leaved Willow
Thrift
Tufted Saxifrage
Tufted Vetch
Wild Angelica
Wild Thyme
Wood Cranesbill

Potentilla crantzii
Alchemilla alpine
Cerastium alpinum
Poa annua
Populus tremula
Arctostaphylos uva-ursi
Agrostis sp
Vaccinium uliginosum
Salix glauca
Vaccinium uliginosum
Alchemilla vulgaris
Cochlearia officinalis
Rumex acetosa
Anthriscus sylvestris
Empetrum nigrum
Taraxacum officinales
Betula pubescens
Betula nana
Salix herbacea
Equisetum arvensis
Angelica archangelica
Calluna vulgaris
Viola canina
Juniperus communis
Cardamine nymmanii
Elymus arenarius
Sagina nodosa
Equisetum palustre
Caltha palustris
Ranunculus acris
Filipendula ulmaria
Silene acaulis
Saxifraga hypnoides
Lupinus nootkatensis
Galium borale
Rumex longifolius
Cardaminopsis petraea
Mertensia maritime
Trifolium pratense
Rhodiola rosea
Sorbus aucuparia
Silene uniflora
Matricaria maritime
Honckenya peploides
Matricaria recutita
Rumex acetosella
Potentilla anserine
Salix phylicifolia
Armeria maritima
Saxifraga caespitose
Vicia cracca
Angelica sylvestris
Thymus praecox
Geranium sylvaticum

This list represents all those species seen by party members of this tour

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Barrow's Goldeneye



Black-tailed Godwit



Brännich's Guillemots



Great Northern Divers



Red-necked Phalarope



Whimbrel mobbing a Common Raven



Northern Gannet



Harlequin Duck

Front cover: Pair of Harlequin Ducks

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