

# North Spitsbergen: In the Realm of Polar Bear and Ice Species List | June 18 – 27, 2024 with Naturalist Journeys



**With Guide John Carlson and participants Tom, Sherry, Cathy, Sandy, Eric, Laura, Linda, Larry, Jeff, and Eileen.**

Our Naturalist Journeys North Spitsbergen tour visited the Svalbard archipelago and spent the bulk of the trip on and around the largest island Spitsbergen. Our home for the duration of the trip was the ice strengthend ship, the M/V *Ortelius*. Excursions off the ship were part of our daily routine, either using Zodiac boats to reach landing spots on the island or to cruise offshore in a number of locations.

This species report Ebird link below details the 24 species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you're new to Ebird, be sure to click on "Show All Details" on the right side of the list as this will expand the report to show you where and when all of the birds were seen and how many.

[North Spitsbergen Naturalist Journeys Tour - June 18 - 27, 2024 - eBird Trip Report](#)

An annotated list of the Bird and Mammals observed on the trip is below.

## **Birds (24):**

**Pink-footed Goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus* — Scattered individuals were observed throughout the trip, but usually at a distance flying by. One pair was more accomodating at the landing at Alkhornet and provided better views for many of us.

**Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis* — Rather common throughout the island. We observed at least a few individuals on most days. Quite abundant around Longyearbyen.

**King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* — We observed these eiders quite a few times throughout the trip, usually associated with glaciers. The most impressive observation was a close flyby of about 20 at Wagonwaybreen.

**Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* — These eiders were, well....common throughout the trip.

**Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* — One pair was observed along the shoreline at Monacobreen.

**Rock Ptarmigan** *Lagopus musta* — Observed at a few different landing sites, but usually at a fair distance. One male was particularly prominent and watched us from above as we walked around the Texas Bar landing area.

**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* — We observed a few prior to embarkation in Longyearbyen.

**Purple Sandpiper** *Calidris maritima* — The most common shorebird of the trip. A few were observed prior to embarkation just west of Longyearbyen (including a banded individual) and a few individuals were also observed at a few landings as well.

**Red Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* — A pair provided great viewing opportunities in a roadside pond near the sled dog kennels west of town on our first and last days in Longyearbyen.

**Great Skua** *Stercorarius skua* — One individual was observed from the bridge of the *Ortelius* at a meltwater pond at Smeerenburg prior to going ashore.

**Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarinus* — One pair was observed harrassing Black-legged Kittiwakes in the pack ice during the furthest north portion of the trip.

**Parasitic Jaeger** *Stercorarius parasiticus* — Fairly common throughout the trip with a number of observations of these birds harrasing Arctic Terns and Black-legged Kittiwakes to steal food from them.

**Dovekie** *Alle alle* — Although Dovekies were observed nearly every day, they were usually in small speedy flocks moving fast across the water. We were able to see individuals at colonies scattered in the scree at Wagonwaybreen.

**Common Murre** *Uria aalge* — One “bridled” individual was observed on the water at Alkefjellet.

**Thick-billed Murre** *Uria lomvia* — Also known as Brunichs Guillimot by our hosts, these birds were ubiquitous in Svalbard. Observed every day of the trip.

**Black Guillemot** *Cephus grylle* — Commonly observed during our trip and often seemed attracted to the ship, both in the water and in flight.

**Atlantic Puffin** *Fratercula arctica* — Observed daily, but never seemed particularly common. Always a delight to see these most colorful auks in their breeding finery.

**Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* — Another very common bird for the trip. Individuals, large feeding groups and nesting colonies. Observed daily.

**Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnea* — Perhaps the most desired bird of the trip of everyone. We observed a few adults in breeding plumage and at least one immature individual in the pack ice near the Seven Islands at the most northern part of our journey.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* — One individual was observed flying past the ship in the pack ice near the Seven Islands.

**Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* — These beautiful brutes were always around.

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* — The Arctic Terns were always around and we observed them daily.

**Red-throated Loon** *Gavia stellata* — There were individuals observed or heard during our morning in Smeerenburg. We also found a nesting pair prior to our departure on the last day at a small pond adjacent to the sled dog kennels west of Longyearbyen.

**Norther Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* — Northern Fulmars were also observed daily, but always seemed as supporting cast to the other birds we were seeing.

**Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* — we observed displaying Snow Buntings daily except for the day that we did spent in the pack ice and didn’t make a landing.

### **Mammals (9):**

**Arctic Fox** *Vulpes lagopus* — Two adults and at least 5 kits were found at a den near the bird cliffs at Alkornet.

**Polar Bear** *Ursus arctos* — One adult female bear with two cubs were observed feeding on a Walrus carcass on our first morning at Krossfjorden. Another very old male in poor condition was observed in the pack ice between Spitzbergen and Wahlbergøya. The last bear of the trip was a healthy young male bear strolling along the shoreline near Smeerenburg.

**Walrus** *Odebenus rosmarus* — A haul out at Smeerenburg provided our best and nearly only views of this iconic arctic mammal. We also observed two individuals playing in the surf off the stern of the ship on our last morning at the pier in Longyearbyen.

**Bearded Seal** *Erignathus barbatus* — Quite a few individuals were located throughout the trip, either in the pack ice or associated with ice floes at the face of glaciers.

**Harbor Seal** *Phoca vitulina* — The most common seal where there wasn’t any ice. A few individuals were quite curious.

**Ringed Seal** *Pusa hispida* — A few individuals of this species were observed hauled out on pack ice off the Seven Islands.

**Minke Whale** *Balaenaptera acutorostrata* — One individual surfaced a few times near Lilliehöökreen.

**Beluga Whale** *Delphinapterus leucas* — A couple of small pods were observed at the base of Monacobreen in Liefdefjorden.

**Spitsbergen Reindeer** *Rangifer tarandus platyrhynchus* — Rather common at some of our landing areas and sign of caribou (hair and/or shed antlers) were present at all of our landings.