

# Iceland: Birding & Nature | June 6-16, 2026

## Trip Report by Bryan Shirley



**Local Guide Daniel Bergmann & NJ Guide Bryan Shirley**

**Tour Participants: Linda, David, Arthur, Sheryl, Cathy, Deb, Jack, Grace, Dana, Laura, Cheryl, Panos, and Ann-Marie**



### **June 6, 2026 Arrivals and Pre-tour Birding**

Most of our group was arriving this morning so Daniel and Bryan were at the airport to greet everyone bright and early this morning. A couple of people had an issue with luggage not arriving, so it took a while for us all to be ready to start birding, but eventually we were ready to go. We started birding just a few minutes from the airport. Our first stop was a Common Eider farm, and it was amazing! Hundreds of Eiders were nesting in the area, and many were only a few feet from the road. Eider farming makes it sound like they are raising the eiders, but really all they do is provide a safe, predator free place for the eiders to breed, then the farmers come along and collect eider down out of the nests, replacing it with grass and having no effect on the eiders. Other birds were plentiful here as well – lots of Graylag Geese, Common Redshank, and Eurasian Oystercatchers were nesting here as well. We stopped at a small pond and found our first rarity of the trip – a Western House Martin was flying around the pond. From there we headed out to the lighthouse at the end of the peninsula at Gardur. We watched seabirds for a bit and saw several Manx Shearwaters – this was the only place we would see them on our tour. After lunch we headed into Reykjavik and checked into our hotel. We were on our own for the evening. Most people took a good nap and got settled into their rooms, then went out and enjoyed the shops and restaurants nearby.

### **June 7, 2026 Beautiful Scenery & Birds on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula**

Today was the “official” start of the tour. After breakfast we met up with those members of our group that weren’t with us yesterday and Daneil arrived to pick us up right on time. Our vehicle was a brand-spanking new



Mercedes. We loaded up and said goodbye to Reykjavik as we started our clockwise circuit of Iceland. We drove through a tunnel under the sea that was nearly 4 miles long, and ended up in small fishing village called Akranes. We made our first birding stop of the day at the picturesque lighthouse near the harbor. Being our first day, we were excited about everything and lots of pictures were taken! A few of us even climbed up to the top of the lighthouse to enjoy the views. After a nice lunch we stopped at a bay in Borgarnes to check out shorebirds and had a pretty good mix. Dunlin and Common Redshank were the most common, but there were about 20 Common Ringed Plover and a few European Golden Plovers as well. As we worked our way down the Snaefellsnes Peninsula the scenery was wonderful – beautiful mountains with the occasional waterfall on the right and the beautiful ocean on the left. The large, snow-covered volcano Snaefelljokull was visible in the distance, looming over the entire area. Before we reached the hotel we stopped at Ytritunga – a rocky beach that is famous for its Harbor Seals and we were not disappointed – several were basking on the rocks nearby and lots more further out. We walked along the beach for a bit checking out the birds and enjoying the beautiful weather and scenery as well. Almost everywhere we stopped along the coast we had the same core group of birds – Common Eiders being the most common. Oystercatchers were also very common. We had very close views of Common Ringed Plover here and a small flock of Sanderling was nice. We were only a few minutes from the hotel, so we decided to check in and take a short break before exploring the area further. Our hotel itself was a great birding spot so it was hard to tear ourselves away to even get our luggage to the rooms! After getting settled and a short break, we met and checked out some of the small ponds nearby. Red-throated Loons and Red-necked Phalarope were breeding on several of the ponds and a flock of over 30 Whooper Swans were feeding on the grass near the golf course. It was a perfect start to our Iceland adventure!

## **June 8, 2026      Seabird Colonies | White-tailed Eagle**

Cold and windy this morning, but a few brave souls opted for a pre-breakfast walk from the hotel. Our hotel is surrounded by birds, including an Arctic Tern colony a few yards from the parking area. The golf course adjacent to our hotel is covered with terns, nesting Oystercatchers, Black-tailed Godwits, and others. This morning we went down the dirt road through the tern colony, getting dive bombed by terns until we got far enough away that they decided we weren't a threat. A couple of Parasitic Jaegers came by, so of course that caused havoc and fired up all the terns again! The volcano, Snaefelljokull, was unfortunately covered in clouds this morning so we were happy that we were able to see it so well yesterday. Back at the hotel we enjoyed our breakfast with the rest of the group (especially the hot coffee and tea to warm us up!) before we loaded into the bus for the day.

Our first stop was only about 20 minutes away at the harbor of the small town called Arnarstapi. The cliffs adjacent to the harbor hold a huge number of seabirds – mostly Black-legged Kittiwakes and Northern Fulmars,



but there were also Great Black-backed Gulls and our first European Shags of the trip. We spent some time enjoying the seabirds and the scenery – the weather had improved a bit since our walk this morning and it was turning into a beautiful day!

A short drive from there we entered Snafelljokull National Park – the park protecting the area around the volcano. After a bit of shopping and checking out the exhibits at the visitor’s center, we continued to another seabird colony, but this colony was for all the Alcids. Common Murres were the most common (aptly named!), but there was a pretty good number of Razorbills as well. It took a bit of searching to find a Thick-billed Murre, but eventually Daniel found one in a nest on the cliff face. Black Guillemot is not very common here either, but a few were flying about. An Atlantic Puffin flew in and landed on the cliff and completing our sweep of the Alcid species of Iceland! We could see the puffin very well, but being only one, distant bird it made us excited to visit a Puffin colony later in the trip.

Next, we birded a few small lakes hoping for a King Eider that had been recently reported, but apparently it had moved on. Lots of Red-throated Loons very close to the road more than made up for the miss and we spent a bit of time photographing them before lunch at the visitor center. After lunch we continued around the North end of the peninsula, passing Arrowhead Mountain (made famous in Game of Thrones) and too many waterfalls to count. At a long fjord we located a couple of Brant, and while scoping them we also found three Barnacle Geese! From there we drove through an old lava field. The moss-covered rocks and surrounding mountains alone would have made the drive worthwhile, but locating a White-tailed Eagle sitting on the rocks made it even more incredible! We watched it for 20 minutes or more, soaking in the experience before continuing onto our hotel for the night.

## **June 9, 2026      Scenic Drive to Akureyri | Arctic Loon, Pink-Footed Goose**

Today was mostly a travel day, but we had some good birding along the way and as usual here, the scenery was wonderful. Iceland doesn’t have provinces or counties, but it is divided into 8 regions. During our tour we would be birding in 7 of the 8 regions. The eighth, WestFjords, we would pass through today but only for a few miles. Those of us that frequently look at ebird maps and want to fill in colors for everywhere they go (ok really it was just me? Lol) were diligently looking for any bird during the few minutes we were in that region. It was fun and helped to pass the time during our drive, plus we found some Whooper Swans before we moved into the Northwestern region. As we drove along the Blanda River, we started seeing quite a few Pink-footed Geese – a new species for our trip. We reached Akureyri, the largest city outside the Reykjavik area, in the late afternoon. The weather wasn’t great and there was a slight drizzle, but not enough to keep us from doing a short walk in the botanical park in the center of town. Redwings (the common thrush of Iceland) were common here and there were a few Eurasian Blackbirds (despite the name another thrush). One member of the group



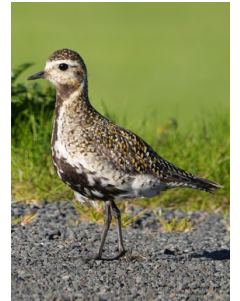
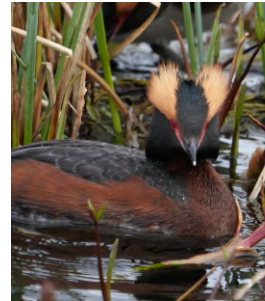
found a Goldcrest, but we were not able to relocate it. After we left the city we made a stop at a beautiful waterfall called Godafoss, or Waterfall of the Gods. Legend has it that over 1000 years ago the local leader through statues of the old Norse Gods into the falls and made Christianity the official religion. This was also the only place so far on our tour where there were lots of other tourists around!

A bit further along the road we stopped to see a famous bird – the only Arctic Loon in Iceland! To the delight of birders, it has been spending summers on the same lake here for several years. There were also Common and Red-throated Loons on the lake and the Arctic actually appeared to have taken a liking to a Common Loon and they were hanging out together. Tonight we had dinner at the town called Husavik, just north of our hotel. A cruise ship was anchored in the harbor so we weren't the only people enjoying the beautiful village. Dinner was wonderful – lots of fish dishes and some of our group said it was the best pizza they had ever had! After dinner it was a short drive to our hotel. Daniel had told us that sometimes a Short-eared Owl was in the area and as we pulled in to the hotel it flew past on cue!

## **June 10, 2026      Lake Myvatn Waterfowl | Gyrfalcon!!**

Started the day visiting one of the ponds we stopped at yesterday – one member of our group saw a Common Pochard here and we wanted to stop and see if we could find it again since they are quite rare here. It only took a few minutes and we located the Pochard in with a few Greater Scaup and Tufted Ducks. Our next stop was along a river with cliffs on both sides to look for a Merling Daniel was nesting nearby. When we arrived there were several Barrow's Goldeneye in the river. In the US they nest in tree cavities, but since there are no trees large enough in Iceland they nest in cavities in the lava rock cliffs. Before long the Melin made an appearance and we were able to watch it through the scopes. From there it was on to Lake Myvatn. Lake Myvatn is the most productive sites in all of Europe for breeding waterfowl – 15 species breed in the area (we saw 17 waterfowl species today!). Myvatn, which translates as Midge Lake, is very aptly named as midges are thick here in the summer and provide a lot of nutrients for the bird life. We started our day at the visitor center. We checked out the displays and ended up setting up the scopes inside the visitor center in an attempt to avoid the midges. We slowly worked our way around the entire lake, stopping whenever we saw something interesting. One of the new birds today was Common Scoter, a recent split from Black Scoter. We stopped to search a cliff for the unofficial bird of Iceland, the Gyrfalcon but unfortunately it wasn't home. The large river that flows out of Lake Myvatn is a great spot for Harlequin Duck and we spent a bit of time watching them and photographing them before lunch.

After a nice lunch we headed to a patch of forest near the lake. It felt nice to get out and walk a bit and it was also nice to see some of the few passerines here. One surprise was we flushed a Eurasian Woodcock, but it was



so quick that not everyone got a good look. Common Snipe were much more cooperative and we had several pose for photos near the trail. We heard the beautiful song of a Eurasian Wren and later were able to locate it in an alder. Redwing were common and we even found a nest with 3 chicks! We had one other new bird here, Common Redpoll, but we would see them much better in a couple of days.

Before we headed back to the hotel for dinner, we decided to give the Gyrfalcon one more chance and this time it was roosting on the cliff! It was quite far but with the scopes we were able to get nice views of this highly sought-after falcon. According to Daniel. Numbers have crashed in recent years due to the bird flu, so we felt fortunate to see one. It was the perfect ending to our day at Myvatn.

## June 11, 2026 Gannet Colony | Little Gull

Today we explored the northeast corner of Iceland. After breakfast we started driving north, checking ponds for anything out of the ordinary along the way. The mountains across the fjord from the small town of Husavik shined in the sunlight – it was another beautiful day. We stopped at a lake that Daniel said has had Little Gull in previous years, but no luck today. We took a break to enjoy the scenery and displays about the interesting geology of the area at the visitor center to Jokulsargljurur National Park, then continued up to the north tip of the peninsula. The main purpose for coming here today was to visit the Gannet and Murre colony here. We could see the two columnar rocks covered in seabirds in the distance so we started our 1.2 mile trek. The first part of the hike was a bit tricky going because the trail crosses a boulder-covered spit of land between the ocean and the lake, requiring careful and slow going until we reached the other side of the bay and were back on solid ground. A few Snow Buntings were flitting about and one perched and sang for us. Most of us had seen Snow Buntings in our home areas but never got to hear one sing before. Who knew what a nice voice they have! From there we slowly climbed up the hill until the seabird colony was right in front of us. Over 1000 Northern Gannets were on the islands and flying around the area! The sides of the cliffs were covered with Common Murres and Northern Fulmars. A few Razorbills were swimming below the cliffs and every once in a while, an Atlantic Puffin would make an appearance. It was a truly magical experience. Once we returned from our hike we went back to Kopasker for lunch, then spent the rest of the afternoon driving and scanning along the coast hoping for shorebirds. We saw lots of the same birds, but our only new trip bird was a few Ruddy Turnstones. On our way back to our hotel our persistence finally paid off, and Daniel located a breeding plumage Little Gull flying around a lake! It was mixed in with a bunch of the regular Black-headed Gulls and Arctic Terns so it took a while to get everybody on it, but eventually everyone was able to get looks at it and see the diagnostic black underwing. Back at the hotel we had a nice dinner with some amazing cheesecake or apple pie for dessert.

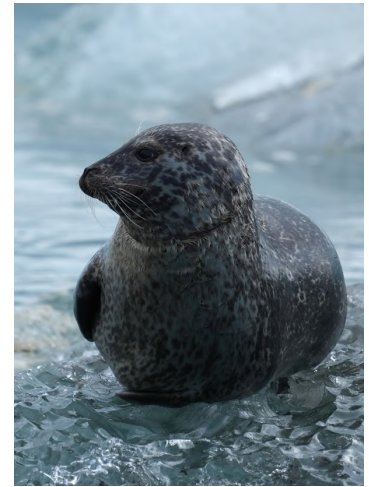


## June 12, 2026 Atlantic Puffins!!

The weather wasn't great today – cold and drizzling rain. We drove most of the morning toward the eastern side of Iceland and arrived at our destination about noon. We were excited to be there, in spite of the cold weather. Today was the long-anticipated visit to the Atlantic Puffin colony. The colony is called Hafnarholmi, which means Harbor Island. It is located just adjacent to the harbor of the small town of Bakkagerdi. Unlike the Gannet colony yesterday, this is a well-known tourist site and there were lots of other people. As we climbed up the stairs and onto the boardwalk, we were surrounded by puffins! They were so close that you could have easily touched them. We spent the next hour photographing and enjoying the antics of the puffins and it was undoubtedly a highlight of the trip for many of us. After we left the colony, we were definitely ready for a hot lunch and the soup a local restaurant in town hit the spot. Once we were full and warm, we birded a bit along the harbor and coast in town. We located a pair of Western House Martin, our second sighting of this rarity in Iceland. After striking out on Purple Sandpipers yesterday, we were relieved to finally find a few foraging along the rocky shoreline. We spent the remainder of the afternoon driving into the fjords of eastern Iceland and it was gorgeous as the sun started breaking through the clouds and hitting the snow-covered peaks surrounding us. Our hotel was in a small, picturesque village on the shore in a beautiful fjord.

## June 13, 2026 Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon | Osprey Chase

Not a cloud in the sky this morning and the mountains around our hotel were spectacular. After breakfast and a quick jump on the community trampoline for some of us (lol), we continued along the SW coast of Iceland. We made a few stops but were never able to find anything new. We stopped in Djupivogur village and spent some time looking for a Hooded Crow, probably the only one in Iceland, but he was not cooperating today. We did have lots of "real" Rock Pigeons – the first true wild Rock Pigeons for all of us. Even though we never found the crow, it is such a cute village and such nice weather we enjoyed spending a bit of time exploring the area. Near the harbor there is an artistic display with 34 huge granite eggs of various Icelandic birds that were fun to see. On a small pond on the outskirts of town, we had closeup Red-necked Phalarope and another beautiful Red-throated Loon on a nest near the road. As we continued toward Hofn for lunch we stopped to scope through a couple of large flocks of Common Scoters hoping for one of the rare Scoters but again no luck. We did see a pair of Eurasian Collared Doves in town – another rarity for Iceland. After lunch Daniel had a report of another rarity nearby for us to look for – an Osprey. We visited an old, abandoned farm and were about to give up when Daniel spotted the Osprey on a telephone pole behind the farmhouse! Of course they are common for most of us, but it was fun to see such a rarity bird here. Our next stop was the famous Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon. We spent about an hour admiring the amazing views of the bergs and glacier. Snow Buntings were singing away and sometimes even posing for photos on the icebergs! A Harbor Seal also was resting on a huge chunk of ice



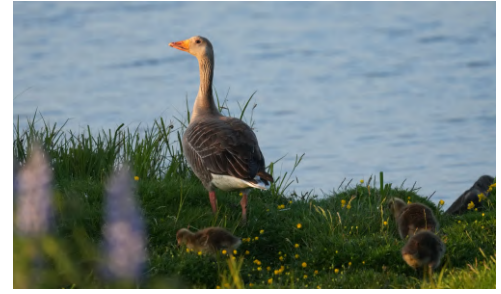
drifting towards us. When it finally got too close it jumped off and found a new iceberg further away. Our hotel was only a few minutes away from the lagoon and was another beautiful location with lots of birds around. As we were unloading the luggage a Great Skua buzzed through the Arctic Tern colony next to the hotel and sent hundreds of terns screaming about. After going through our daily bird checklist, we had another great dinner before saying goodnight.

## **June 14, 2026      Glacier Lagoon | Barnacle Geese | Goldcrest (finally!)**

We started the day back at Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon. We wanted to spend a bit more time there and see it with different light than last night. We also went down and saw the “diamonds”, or glacial ice chunks that wash ashore on the black sand beach. Our next stop was another nearby glacial lake, possibly even more pretty than the last. A bit further west Daniel knew an area with several nesting pair of Great Skuas so we spent some time photographing and birding that area before lunch. We had a hot soup buffet for lunch before we started working our way back to the hotel. As we drove we stopped at several patches of forest to continue searching for Goldcrest as we had for several days. As it often does, once again our persistence paid off and we finally found a cooperative pair. We arrived back at the hotel early enough for a bit of free time to relax or photograph birds around the hotel. As with other hotels, we were in a perfect spot with lots of birds around. There was an Arctic Tern colony nearby and a couple hundred Barnacle Geese were flying around and feeding in the field next to the hotel. The hotel also had a small museum about the early settlers of the area and the famous author Hórbergur Thórdarson who grew up here. The food on this trip has been wonderful and tonight was another great meal.

## **June 15, 2026      Black Sand Beach | Redpoll & Crossbill Feeder**

Our last full day started great with a pair of Common Wood Pigeons in a freshly plowed field, another rarity to add to our list. We continued to work our way west, having nearly completed our circuit of Iceland. We stopped in Vik (pronounced veek!) and visited a gorgeous black sand beach. We were just around the corner from the famous black sand beach but Daniel wisely brought us here to avoid the crowds. There are a few large rocks offshore that according to legend were one trolls before they were turned to stone. It was quite far way, but the cliffs were covered with puffins, fulmars, and other birds. Lunch was at a local brewery and they had some pretty amazing burgers. In the afternoon we stopped at a friend of Daniel’s who has a bird feeder. There were several dozen Redpoll and one Common Crossbill coming to the feeders. We spent about an hour here photographing and enjoying the birds before continuing on to our last night’s hotel.



## January 16, 2026      Last Day Birding | End of Tour

Our last day ended up being great weather – perhaps the best of the trip. After breakfast we started toward the airport, but we didn't plan on being there until the afternoon so we had plenty of time to explore. We spent some time searching for a King Eider, but came up empty. We did find a Common Goldeneye as a consolation prize though. We checked a few ponds and flocks of Eider as we drove toward the airport, but were unable to find anything new. One of the highlights of our drive was seeing the effects of the recent volcano eruption in Grindavik. The lava had flowed right to the edge of town and then was diverted with a rock wall that had been built for that purpose, just like we would if we were trying to divert water from a flood. We ended our birding right where we started – at the Eider farm and the Gardur Lighthouse. It was a fitting end and our tour of Iceland felt complete. We had one last lunch together and then headed to the airport where we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways. Thank you again to our wonderful guide Daniel – your knowledge of the Icelandic birds was wonderful and your jokes kept the drives interesting too!

*Photos: Icelandic Horses (Bryan Shirley - BS), Humpback Whale (BS), Atlantic Puffin (BS), Sanderling (BS), Scenic (Ann-Marie Francis - AF), Black-legged Kittiwake (BS), Red-throated Loon (BS), Scenic (BS), Waterfall (Dana Hardy - DH), Eurasian Golden Plover (BS), Horned Grebe (BS), Northern Gannet (BS), Long-tailed Duck (BS), Atlantic Puffin (BS), Red-necked Phalarope (BS), Harbor Seal (BS), Glacier Lake (DH), Snow Bunting (BS), Great Skua (BS), Icelandic Horses (AF), Graylag Goose (BS)*