

Iceland Birding & Nature | Trip Report | June 17-27, 2021 | by Dan Donaldson



With Guide Dan Donaldson and participants Bev, David, Donald, Fran, Heather, Jo, Kim, Maureen, Rebecca, and Rob



Iceland is a land of constant transition, with landforms actively created by volcanic activity and continental uplift while constantly eroded away by grinding glaciers the pounding of the Atlantic Ocean on its edges. Here, too, birds are also in constant transition with habitats continuously being created and altered by geologic, atmospheric, seasonal and human forces. Shorebirds were everywhere! The shorebirds we observed were away from water in grassy fields and pastures either nesting or foraging for insects. With nearly 24 hours of sunlight, birds were active around the clock. This trip focused on nesting seabirds, waterfowl and shorebirds and all species seen were in great numbers, but we also had plenty of opportunities for passerines and birds of prey. This was also an amazing cultural journey. Our local guide, Trausti, kept the group engaged with sharing stories on Icelandic customs and entertained us with Icelandic sagas about the people, locations and land features we visited. Here's a fun first! We compiled a "Geothermal Hot Tub Bird List!" This list was tallied as the group relaxed in geothermal hot tubs at various locations we visited across Iceland. It's a short, but sweet list and included Black-tailed Godwit, Snow Bunting, Common Snipe, Whimbrel, Eurasian Oystercatcher and Parasitic Jaeger. Perhaps a geothermal springs/hot tub bird list challenge is in order?



Thurs., Jun. 17 Arrival in Keflavik

We arrived very early in Keflavik after an overnight flight and we were then on our own to explore Keflavik, bird the local shoreline and cliffs, and do any last minute shopping. As this was our first evening here, we experienced the land of the midnight sun on this first night, as the sun was still bright in the sky and our blackout shades help darken our rooms. This time of year, the sun dips just barely below the horizon for an hour or two before rising again, not far from where it set.

Fri., Jun. 18 Garbskaji Lighthouse | Reykjavik | Snaefellsnes Peninsula

With the sun already high in the sky, we were all packed for the day as we boarded our custom bus, specifically outfitted for winter travel, at 9:00 am to start our day. Before leaving Keflavik, which means driftwood bay, we birded the shoreline as a group, spotted a flock of Common Eider close along the shore and had great looks and opportunities for amazing photographs of a White-winged Scoter, uncommon in Iceland. As we drove through town, we were amazed at all the shorebirds in the yards and fields. Any open spot with turf grasses had Eurasian Golden Plovers, Whimbrels or Eurasian Oyster Catchers in them. Areas with taller meadow plants had foraging and nesting White-headed Wagtails, Redwings (a thrush, not the RWBB), and Meadow Pipits. Any lava outcrops in these areas, even those close to the roads, had colonies of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were by far the most prevalent gull in the Keflavik area this time of year.

From Keflavik, we headed to nearby Garbskaji Lighthouse to look for seabirds that often fly by this rocky point. We were delighted to find a large flock of Common Eider with at least 20 newly hatched chicks foraging near the beach. These chicks were little black puffs of feathers, sounding just like chicken chicks, trying their best to dive but were so lightweight that they never broke the surface of the water. We spent about 30 minutes at the lighthouse scanning the rocky shore and were rewarded with views of Great Cormorant, European Shag, and a large flock of Black-Legged Kittiwake. Small flocks of Northern Gannets also flew nearby as we watched Gray Seals patrol the surf offshore. Upon departing the area, we drove through Reykjavik and stopped at a local fish and chips diner for our first fish and chips lunch. It was Atlantic Cod, and it was wonderful.



Back on the road and heading north along the western coastline, we stopped at several ponds along our route to the Snaefellsnes Peninsula, and all of these ponds were occupied by resident breeding pairs of Horned Grebes. Taking a quick stop at Borgarfjörður Bay, we located the local White-tailed Eagle nest and found an adult sitting in the nest, likely incubating eggs. We watched for about 20 minutes hoping for a nest change or food drop off but weren't successful. Regardless, we left very happy with our eagle sighting.

The 6-kilometer Hvalfjörður Tunnel leads under the Hvalfjörður fjord and this route takes us 500 feet under the fjord saving us over an hour in drive time to get around it. Emerging on the other side, we entered the famous Snaefellsnes Peninsula, where we spent the next three days. The landscape here changes drastically and the near mountains get larger and more majestic as we travel west along the south side of the peninsula. Every cliff within a couple miles of the sea hosts many pairs of Northern Fulmars. Mountains and volcano cones are now high enough and hold snow and glaciers. Between the mountains and the ocean, wide and flat grassy plains extend to the sea. We got a tip from the local birding network and stopped at Thor's house to try for the rarest bird in Iceland that was being observed this week. Well, rare for Icelanders anyway. After a quick search in the willow patches around the property, we located the quest bird, a Black and White Warbler! This was Iceland's 4th record for this bird. It was a treat to see our old friend here in Iceland. For some in the group, this observation boasted the best looks and photographs they've ever had of this bird. Our lodgings on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula were at the Kast Guesthouse, a quaint inn along the southern shore of the peninsula with wonderful food and a nearby geothermal bath house, at the base of the Þorgeirsfell Mountain. We home based out of here for the next two nights. We got settled, relaxed a bit before dinner, with some of us enjoying the geothermal spa. After a wonderful local fish dinner, we reviewed our bird list, as we did every evening on this trip, reviewed the day ahead, and head off to bed with the sun still bright in the sky.

Sat., Jun. 19 Flatey Island | Berserker Lava Field

We woke up to Black-tailed Godwits calling and Common Snipe performing their wonderful display flights with whinnying tail feathers. The pastures in the vast plains in front of the inn were full of sheep, Icelandic horses and breeding shorebirds. Headed out on the Baldur Ferry, we traveled to Flatey Island located about halfway out



into the Bay of Breidafjörður. It was a beautiful, sunny morning and we had smooth “sailing” with flat water. We spent the majority of the 40-minute trip scanning the water for seabirds and porpoise. Arriving on the island, we disembarked at the tiny fishing village of Flatey, once an active fishing village. Today it is a low-key tourist destination that offers a glimpse into historic village life. We immediately were greeted by singing Snow Buntings staking out territories along the rocky shoreline of the harbor. As we walked through the village and up into the grassy cliffs, we were treated to Common Redshanks calling from almost any high spot in the landscape and bickering with neighboring breeding pairs. Eventually, we were able to find and photograph fledglings walking along the cliff tops, too. Overall, we observed 20 species on the island including: Common Eider, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Parasitic Jaeger, Atlantic Puffin, White Wagtails, Meadow Pipits, and very close encounters (we were mobbed) with Arctic Terns that were nesting in most any high clump of grass.

Back on the mainland, we visited the Berserker Lava Field, a 3,000-year-old lava field that seemed frozen in time. Moss covered and very rocky, it was nearly impassible except for one road that the Icelandic Sages say was cleared by a Berserker from Europe who was courting the owner’s daughter. Today, it is perfect habitat for Rock Ptarmigan. We searched rocky, high points here for males guarding their territories. We spotted one cooperative pair of ptarmigans and we got many great looks and photographs.

At the large lake at the end of the lava flow, we encountered a distant White-tailed Eagle. It eventually soared slow and low over the group allowing for fantastic views and photographs. Working our way back towards the along the northern coast, we stopped at each inlet looking for waterfowl and seabirds and were happy to add Whooper Swans, Dunlin, Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, Mallards and many Whimbrels to our tally for the day. We rewarded ourselves for a great day by taking a quick trip to the geothermal hot spring spa for a soak before dinner.



Sun., Jun. 20 Arnastapi | Svortulof Lighthouse

We began our day with a wonderful stop in the Village of Arnastapi. This is one of the most scenic harbor/villages on the peninsula and we had some of our most dramatic ocean cliff views and scenic photography here. The small, but active, harbor is tucked into the 100-foot lava flow cliffs that surround the village on three sides. Northern Fulmars and Black-legged Kittiwake's nest on all available cliff ledges that are protected from the weather. These nests were not protected from Common Ravens, as we witnessed several raven egg-stealing raids into the cliffside colonies. It was a sunny day, but cooler here, as south winds push cold air off the ocean toward the mainland. Many Arctic Terns sitting on the roads and parking lots— to keep warm? We walked the perimeter of the cliffs along meadow foot trails with the boisterous calls of Arctic Terns constantly overhead. One destination of this hike was to visit a large freshwater pond near the edge of the cliff that is used by many sea birds to rinse salt from their feathers, drink fresh water and just loiter awhile out of the wind. We spotted several pairs of Black-headed Gulls who nest in the sedges here. Back in our bus, we headed to Svortulof Lighthouse and Saxholsbjarg Bird Cliffs located on the extreme western point of the Snaefellsnes Peninsula. Here the brilliant orange Svortulof Lighthouse stands tall over breeding colonies of Common and Thick-billed Murres along the vertical coastline. We spent over an hour at this spot, scoping and photographing the hundreds of seabirds nesting close to the observation deck and the thousands of birds feeding in huge flocks just offshore. A pod of Sperm Whales was spotted in the distance here, too. They moved slowly along the



surface before they rose a little higher in the water, closer to the surface to take a deep breath, turn down and lift their tails high above the water as they dove deep, perhaps to feed on giant squid.

As we drove across the top of this barren ancient lava field, we spotted a large tussock with a perched male Rock Ptarmigan surveying his breeding territory. Tussocks are mounds of ground covered in grasses, rising high over the rocks where ptarmigans have been sitting and leaving droppings. These accumulated droppings, perhaps accumulating for hundreds of years, give grasses a foothold to grow in this harsh landscape. Tussocks stand out like pylons against the sky and our group after learning this silhouette, can now spot them, and potentially Rock Ptarmigan sites, for the rest of the trip. Making a quick stop in the commercial port of Olafsvik, we had great looks gulls-at Black-headed, Iceland, Lesser Black-Backed, and Great Black-backed Gulls. The nearby beach and bay hosted Purple Sandpipers, Horned Grebes, Eurasian Oystercatchers, and we also spotted many Northern Fulmars soaring overhead here.

Mon., Jun. 21 Akureyri

We left the Snaefellsnes Peninsula and headed north and east along the north coast of Iceland to the town of Akureyri where we based out of the next 3 nights. This was a travel day but there was a lot of birding and interesting geology and geography we observed along the way. We drove through haunting, treeless landscapes of grass valleys and towering jagged mountain ranges. It ended up being a fantastic waterfowl spotting day as we noodled along the coastline getting more looks and picked up Common Shelduck. Eventually, we turned away from the coastline as the roads swing south to avoid fjords and mountain ranges. We passed through many ancient, glaciated valleys punctuated with young volcanic mountains and craters. These broad valleys each with its own stream or river draining to the fjords to the north offered plenty of kettle ponds for dabbling waterfowl. Most of these ponds had breeding pairs of Whooper Swans and outlet streams or rivers heading north to the ocean. Passing through the valley town of Akrahreppur, we got wonderful looks at 80 Pink-footed Geese with goslings feeding and resting along a large glacial outwash river.



We arrived at the Lamb Inn, our full-service lodging for the next couple of evenings and were immediately welcomed by the resident Border Collie, which joined us (just keeping track of us), anytime we were outside the hotel. At dinner, we were thrilled to learn that our chef is a Michelin star chef in training. He also competes for the national Icelandic Chef team in European competitions. Meals at this Inn were incredible and featured local proteins and herbs that were often collected by the chef that day on the local mountain. The owner of the inn, a tall elderly gentleman, was so happy to have our group staying at the inn, as we were the first group of tourists to stay here since their country welcomed back travelers after Covid restrictions, that he sang several songs to us while we enjoyed drinks before dinner.

Tues., Jun. 22 Lake Myvatn | Goda Foss | Search for Gyrfalcons

This day we headed inland to Lake Myvatn, with more waterfowl and a Gyrfalcons as our target birds. Immediately after pulling out of the inn, someone from the group spotted a pretty special swallow, a European Barn Swallow. This is the same species as our Barn Swallow, but with a different common name. This swallow has a different plumage, too, with a bright white breast and belly more similar looking to Tree Swallows. Our guide, Traustie, was excited to hear this, turned the van around and we relocated it. We were pleased to hear that our sighting made the island's rare bird alert. Twenty minutes down the road, we observed a Short-eared Owl hunting the fields below the road. We made a quick stop along the road and found Redwings and Common Redshanks in the fields as well. Headed back on the road, we made a quick stop at Goda Foss (waterfall of the Gods), a wide horseshoe shaped waterfalls actively cutting a deep ravine through ancient lava fields. The striking blue glacial river water turns green as it makes it to the dark ravine below.

We arrived at Lake Myvatn and were greeted by an unexpected natural phenomenon, an incredibly large fly hatch, there must have been millions of them. Luckily, they were non-biting and head nets kept us comfortable as we birded the area around the lake searching for Gyrfalcons. Upon returning through this area later in the afternoon, the flies were gone, and we got much better views of the Gyrfalcons. At this visit, we located the Gyrfalcons nest with chicks in the nearby cliffs on the side of Vindbelgur Mountain. As we turned around to scan the lake, we saw small groupings of Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Gadwall, Long-tailed Ducks and Barrows Goldeneyes. Arctic Terns were present here as well as they foraged in the small wetland ponds around the main lake. We drove the circumference of the lake, stopping at Skutustrader, an area of ancient volcanic mud pots or "pseudocraters" jutting up like junior volcanoes across the landscape. This area is now a park with walking trails.



The grassy conical hills of the mud pots are breeding locations for Red-necked Phalaropes, feeding noisily at our feet. We also explored interesting geological formations along the trails that are home to many of Iceland's micro plants such as Dwarf Birch, Alpine Azalea, Common Moonwort and more. A pair of Common Scoter were also spotted in the nearby bay as we loaded up in the vans to return to the Lamb Inn.

Wed., Jun. 23 Hrisey Island | Akureyri

This day, our explorations took us to nearby Hrisey Island, a small protected and walkable island that sits at the mouth of the Eyja Fjord (Eyhafjordur). To get to the island, we embarked on a short 15-minute ferry ride and in traveling there, we got good looks at passing seabirds, including Common Eiders, Harlequins, and Black Guillemots. Once on the island, we had an easy-going day of soaking in iconic Iceland scenery-the amazing views of the towering and jagged mountains surrounding us on three sides and views of the fjord opening up to the vast Arctic Ocean to the north. As we walked away from the ferry terminal, we were immediately greeted by a brilliant-white singing male Snow Bunting that had staked his claim in the large rocks protecting the marina. Common Redshanks were prolific here and are paired up for breeding season. Their loud, piercing chatter calls were heard throughout the day as they called from grassy hilltops and rooftops of the centuries-old barns and cottages on the island. Many shorebirds nest here but they were dispersed across the treeless landscape. Fortunately, a small freshwater pond attracted many of the shorebirds in to drink and loiter allowing for great looks. We observed Common and Ringed Plovers, Whimbrels, Purple Sandpipers, many Black-tailed Godwits, as well as all 9 of the gulls on our bird list including Black-Headed Gull. Hrisey Island holds the largest breeding colony of Arctic Terns in Europe, and the terns were constantly patrolling the skies as our walking paths took us through the open fields of their breeding habitat. Many duck species were observed here in the calm bays along the shoreline as well. We watched Tufted Ducks, Common Eiders, Green-winged Teal and Long-tailed Ducks picking through rafts of aquatic vegetation or diving for fish underneath the mats.

The last leg of our walk around the island took us through areas of ancient charcoal pits. This is a reminder of the history of this land, a reminder that this amazing treeless landscape once was covered with large tracts of low-growing forests that were all harvested. Once most of the trees were gone, soil erosion, sheep and wind have prevented trees from recolonizing the landscape. This exposed charcoal pit area happens to be great habitat for Rock Ptarmigan, and we watched several individual males sitting on the highest of rock outcrops.



In the afternoon, we visited some reforested areas near our inn and the town of Akureyri. Mostly young Siberian Spruce brought in for their fast-growing habit, these wood lots are home to Gold Crests (a large kinglet species) and European Wrens which both were located on our stops here. Another great day was had by all and we made a quick stop for ice cream in town before heading back to the Lamb Inn.

Thurs., Jun. 24 Hofsjokull Glaciers | Hvita River | Gullfoss

This morning, we packed our bags and spent the day traveling due south across the ancient highland route to the southern shore of the island. While still in the lowlands, we stopped at freshwater ponds and rivers searching for waterfowl, including better views and photographs of both Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks.

Our path, traversing the island took us across high and barren volcanic plains with sparse vegetation. Once prime grazing lands for sheep, today the soil is largely eroded away, and bare rock and sand is all that remains. The birding was also sparse here and Northern Wheatears were the dominant bird in this wind-blown landscape. Wheatears took to flight from the road in front of the bus or were spotted nearby as we made stops along this route. As we crossed the center of the island, we got our first looks of two continental glaciers in the distance, the Langjokull and the Hofsjokull Glaciers. As we approached the glaciers, we stopped at a geothermal site, the Hveravellir hot springs. We stopped here not only for lunch, but also grabbed our bathing suits and took an afternoon soak at the natural hot springs. This also allowed us to add species to our hot tub list for this trip as a bold Snow Bunting popped up close by and worked its way along the water's edge of the tub and outlet creek.

Fed and refreshed, we headed back to the bus and continued our way south, traveling between the two glaciers through the 20-mile gap between them. The terrain here was very arid and windswept. We stopped to scan for waterfowl in the large glacial meltwater lakes and then kept heading south. All this melt water in the lakes and outlet streams eventually join to form the Hvita River. One of our stops in this area was at one of the river's great falls as it makes its way to the North Atlantic, the famous Gullfoss (Golden Falls). These falls drop from the



wide, flat plains into a canyon that has eroded 300 feet down into the lava rock. There were wonderful amenities here, including a gift shop, all of them welcome after our long travel day. Before leaving, we briefly spotted a pair of Merlins on the cliffs across the canyon, and marked the location of a probable nest, as we knew we would be traveling back through here again in the days ahead and hoped to view it again.

Our day ended at our new lodging for the next couple nights, the Stracta Hotel, a modern Scandinavian style luxury hotel, in the City of Hella on the southern coastline of Iceland.

Fri., Jun. 25 Puffins! | Westman Islands

PUFFIN Day! On this day, we headed to the Westman Islands, the land of fire and puffins. We were up early for a made to order breakfast and then we jumped off to the Westman Islands to view what is believed to be the largest breeding colony of Atlantic Puffins in the world with an estimated 1 million birds breeding in the island chain. Arriving ahead of schedule for the ferry, as planned, we made a stop at the Markarfljót River outlet where the river's glacial melt water and sediment load meet the North Atlantic Ocean. We wanted to visit this area as it's a known area for Great Skua and we were not disappointed. We stood along a concrete erosion control structure that happens to serve as a wind deflector for soaring birds and were only there for a few minutes before Great Skuas arrived, gliding along the uplift provided by the structure. They soared past us many times, sometimes not more than 15 feet away providing for wonderful observations and allowing for stunning photographs of these birds. In the field behind us, we witnessed a Parasitic Jaeger raid a seemingly poorly located European Golden Plover nest. The adults fared well but will likely have a failed nesting season attempt this year as a result of the raid. Perhaps the Jaeger will not. Boarding the ferry, we were delighted to learn that our vessel was a Hybrid Electric ferry and observed it connected to its charger as we boarded the boat. This ferry crossing was an amazing experience as it was silent and had no diesel fumes. Manx Shearwaters crossed back and forth in front of the ferry during our crossing, and we got glimpses of Harbor Seals, too, as we entered the rocky shoreline of Westman Island of Heimaey. Heimaey and its town of 4000 people are famous for the volcanic eruption in 1973 that buried most of the town in ash and 1/3 of the town in lava flow.

We enjoyed a wonderful lunch at the Gott restaurant in town and then headed to the puffin cliffs. Amazingly, the entrance to the breeding area was very low-key and looked much more like the entrance to the local baseball field rather than one of most spectacular birding sights in the world. We walked the animal trails in the



pasture (sheep, of course) up onto the cliffs on the south side of the island. Once there, we were amazed by the sight of thousands of Atlantic Puffins up in the air, in the sea below us, and all along the top edge and along the slopes of the cliffs around us. This area offered a large, permanent viewing blind which were happy to have all to ourselves. This lookout area afforded views to the sea below and back towards the slope revealing wonderful observations and opportunities for photographing the puffins. We also quickly discovered that there were puffin burrows very close to trail and the blind. Topping our earlier views, we got even more incredible views and photos standing just outside the blind as the puffins flew in, diving into their burrows with beaks full of glass eels. Afterwards, we explored the nearby lava flows from the 1973 eruption of the Eldfell volcano and tour parts of town that were dug out of the ash and peeked at those that remain under the 40 foot lava flow. We also had a bit of free time to explore the town and shop before our return trip home.

Sat, Jun. 26

Golden Circle | Strokkur Geyser | Pingvellir

This was our last full day of exploring in Iceland and on this day, we explored the southern region of Iceland, visiting some of the locations on the famous Golden Circle of attractions. We started our day by returning to Gullfoss to relocate the nesting pair of Merlins we observed just a few days earlier. The weather was much nicer on this day, with crisp clear skies and we also were rewarded with much better views of the Gullfoss Waterfall. We scanned the cliffs of the gorge for the field location we made mental notes of days before. After about 20 minutes of only seeing White Wagtails, we finally observed a Merlin fly in to the nesting area. We had good timing this day and watched a nest change and even got to see one of the fluffy, white young in the nest. It was a far distance, a bit too far away for photographs, but enjoyed views of it through the scope. This was a fantastic start to our morning! From Gullfoss, we headed down to an active geothermal area featuring the Strokkur Geyser. Strokkur is a medium sized geyser that erupts/blows reliably every 8 minutes and reaches heights of 30 meters. The cool air and bright sunny skies on this day made for stunning views of eruptions with billowing steam against perfect, blue skies. While here, we also toured the rest of the geothermal park's hot springs and mud pots, then headed to lunch at Efstidalur Farm. This operation started as a dairy farm with a small retail



operation and today boasts a full-service restaurant with picture windows overlooking the dairy operations as well as panoramic pasture views.

The rest of our afternoon was spent at Pingvellir (Fields of Parliament) National Park – pronounced “thing vellir”, and named for its Althing-meaning gathering. It is Iceland’s original site of parliament dating back to the 10th century and was used until 1798. A large, natural amphitheater is where parliament would meet outdoors annually and small stone foundations of encampments that were used are still visible. Yes, this area is loaded with cultural history, but the amazing natural history is what brought us here. This entire park lies within a rift valley created by the Mid-Atlantic Rift where the North American Plate is pulling away from the Eurasian Plate at a speed of 25 mm a year. Although this is a tiny amount, it is enough to cause land deformation resulting in regular earthquakes in the area. The Mid-Atlantic Rift crosses Iceland and Iceland is the only place you can view this rift from land. This tectonic activity is coupled with the volcanic and glacial history and as a result, has created an area like no other place on earth. Long cliff faces along the North American plate have deep fissures filled with water. Glacial melt waters accumulate in these fissures and are some of the clearest waters in the world as it has been filtered as it travels through miles of lava rock. Some of the water has visibility of over 100 meters and as a result these fissures are recognized as one of the world’s top 5 dive sites. All of this melt water, combined with the surface water accumulated from both plates form Lake Pingvellirvatn, Iceland’s largest natural lake.

We spent our afternoon driving a large loop around the entire area and explored habitats on both sides of the rift. Starting on the eastern boundary, the Eurasian side of the valley, we stopped at a road side viewing platform built for viewing the expanse of the valley. At this location, we also explored a wood lot and scrub meadow below the platform and added Common Snipe, Goldcrest, Eurasian Wren and Redwings to our list for the day. Driving north around Lake Pingvellirvatn, we spotted waterfowl in a small inlet of the lake and view more Graylag Geese, Mallards, 20 Harlequin Ducks, more Redwings, and also had great views with a nice, close visit from a Meadow Pipit. Rounding the northern edge of the park, we travelled along the high cliffs of the



North American Plate and stopped at several waterfalls that plunge into the fissures from the flat plains above. Rushing water of these falls attracted Harlequin Ducks which we never got tired of looking at or photographing. Our final destination in the area is the Pingvellir Visitor Area for viewing the incredible clear waters in the flooded fissures in the area. At this location, we physically walked right up to the North American Plate (at the bottom of the cliff face) and could view the most active areas of the fault line. The deep, clear fissures and lakes and streams that connect them are prime waterfowl breeding habitat and it was at this spot that we got some of our best views of Red-throated Loons, Red-breasted Mergansers, Harlequins, and Whimbrels, and often in the same binocular view. We returned late to Hotel Stracta and had a wonderful dinner and reviewed our adventures of the day.

Sun., Jun. 27 Botanical Gardens | Departures

It was an early breakfast and departure for us on this morning as we were headed back to Reykjavik to tackle our pre-travel COVID testing in time for our flights. After testing, we spent the rest of the day exploring the City of Reykjavik. We visited City Hall where they have an incredible 50 foot, three dimensional model of Iceland. It was wonderful to relive our trip by walking around the map and seeing each location we birded and where we lodged. The City Hall was built on the banks of a large lake, a striking interface of nature and city. We observed a pair of breeding Whooper Swans and other waterfowl on the lake, too.

We headed to the Botanical Gardens for lunch and for some more birding. The tree collections here hosted to large flocks of hundreds of Common Redpolls and we got our best looks of this species for the entire trip here in the city. Common Ravens were also at home here, plus we also scored the best views of Eurasian Blackbirds which nest in several of the collections, their piercing thrush-like calls heard during our entire visit to at the gardens. After our last lunch together, our group began to separate. About half of our group were extending their Iceland adventures for another week, with some renting small camping vans to explore more remote areas of the Iceland. This is also where we said our goodbyes to Trausti, our wonderful local guide. The remainder of the group took some time to explore the Hallgrímskirkja Church (Church of Iceland) famous for its modern towering architecture. This is also the site of the national monument for Leif Erikson, perhaps truly the first European to discover the new world. Afterward, we settled into the Sands Hotel in the historic district of Reykjavik. We had time to relax and to do some last minute shopping for souvenirs and gifts. We also enjoyed our last dinner at the ROK Restaurant specializing in modern takes on traditional Icelandic foods. Served tapas

style, we had the opportunity to savor shared plates of cured reindeer meats, duck, Atlantic Cod and salmon, mushroom salads, and petite desserts. Afterwards, we walked back to our hotel, offered our last official salutations of the trip and turned in as most of us had an early departure in the morning.

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Dan Donaldson - DD), Ringed Plover (DF), Common Murres & Razorbills (DF), Icelandic Horses (DD), Common Eider (David Friedman - DF), White-winged Scoter (DF), Red-necked Phalarope (DF), Birders (DF), Snaefellsnes Peninsula (Rebecca Friedman - RF), Black and White Warbler (DF), Eurasian Whimbrel (DF), Snow Bunting (DF), Sheep (DF), Puffin (DF), Flatey Island (RF), Redshanks (DF), Arnarstapi (RF), Kittiwake (DF), Black-headed Gulls (DF), Common Raven (DF), Oystercatcher (DF), Red-throated Loon (DF), Border Collie (DD), Lamb Inn (DF), Tufted Duck (DF), Lava Field (RF), Eider Ducklings (DF), Micro plants (DD), European Golden Plovers (DF), Harlequin Duck (DF), Redwing (DF), Scenic (RF), Pink-footed Geese (DF), Puffin (DF), Great Skua (DF), Harbor Seal (DF), Scenic (RF), Greylag Goose (DF), Common Snipe (DF), Goldcrest (DF) Glacier Scenic (DF), Redpoll (DF), Flowers (RF), Whooper Swan (DF)