

Iceland: Birding & Nature | Species List

June 13 – 23, 2022 | with Naturalist Journeys



**With Mason Flint, Daniel Bergmann, and 9 participants:
Leila, Bill, Ilana, Jeff, Maddy, Steve, Jay, Karen, Jackie, and Glenn-marie**

Compiled by Mason Flint

Summary:

Iceland's scale, rugged snow-capped volcanos, countless waterfalls, green-gold meadows, and blustery fjords provide a spectacular backdrop for birding. Although lacking the species diversity found in other birding hotspots around the world, the staggering number of birds engaged in nearly around-the-clock feeding and breeding activity, all set in a mostly open landscape made for a great trip. We scheduled the tour to coincide with the peak breeding season, provided opportunities to see dozens of species nesting or with fledglings. We saw 76 species, nearly all of the regularly occurring summer birds in Iceland plus several difficult-to-see or rare species. Shorebirds were everywhere and easy to see and photograph with Black-tailed Godwits and Common Redshanks seemingly in every field or fencepost. Countless ponds and lakes had dozens or sometimes hundreds of swans and other waterfowl. Seabirds, including razorbill, murre, guillemot, and puffin, were active at nesting sites or feeding close to shore, sometimes too close for binoculars. We saw most of Iceland's breeding songbirds including Goldcrest, Redwing, Eurasian Blackbird, Common Redpoll, and rare breeding Fieldfare. Some days were punctuated with sightings of birds of prey including White-tailed Eagle, Short-eared Owl, Gyrfalcon, and Merlin. Daniel, our local guide, seemed to know exactly where to look and shared his knowledge of Icelandic culture, language, history, geology, and plant life as we traveled around and across the island.



BIRDS (76 species recorded)

DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae

Graylag Goose *Anser anser* – Common and seen most days near water, agricultural fields, and pastures.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* – Seen along the rocky glacial river near Silfrastadhir during our drive from the Snæfellsnes Peninsula to Akureyri.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* – Common in freshwater ponds and nearby pastures most days, sometimes with cygnets.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* – Seen on our first full day near Borgarnes and again at Selfoss near the end of the trip.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* – One of the less common birds we saw, seen only once in one of the ponds along the highway on the southern Snæfellsnes Peninsula

Gadwall *Mareca strepera* – We saw a few of these, Iceland's least common breeding waterfowl, at Mývatn Lake.

Eurasian Widgeon *Mareca penelope* – Observed on at least four days on freshwater lakes including several chicks during our drive up to the 66th parallel.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* – Common, seen almost daily in ponds and lakes.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* – First just one near Rif on the north side of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula and then at least 10 near Einarstaðir during one of our drives to Mývatn Lake.

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca* – Seen at two locations near Mývatn Lake, this species is sometimes split as the Common Teal.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* – We saw one of this uncommon species at the Mýrdalur ponds.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* – This much sought-after rarity in North America was abundant, seen almost every day in freshwater.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* – This Tufted Duck cousin was seen on three days including good numbers at Mývatn Lake.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* – By far the most abundant waterfowl species, seen most days including thousands at the bridge at Kolgrafarfjörður on the north side of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* – Good looks of one bird in the rocky inlet by the small harbor at Arnarstapi on our second day on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, and again near Mývatn Lake.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* – Two or three in two different locations around Mývatn Lake.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* – We had brief looks at one as we returned to our hotel near Akureyri and more the next day at Mývatn Lake.

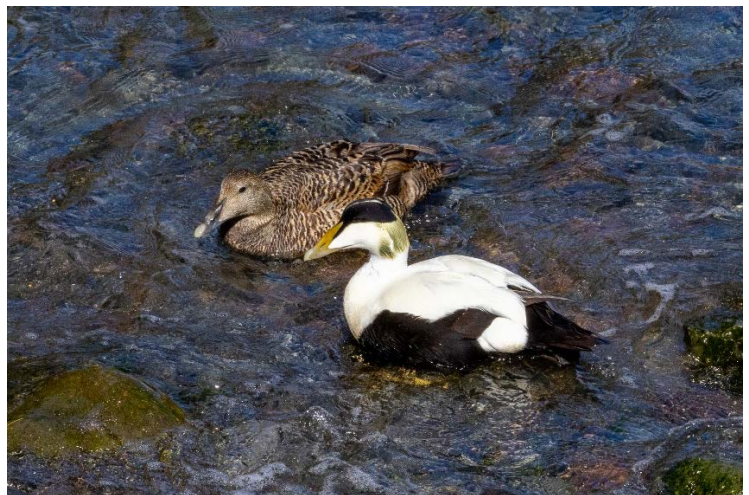
Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* – One on the small rushing stream in the borderline hurricane winds on the way to Mývatn Lake and more later the same day on the lake when the winds calmed down.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser* – One at Thingvellir National Park near Selfoss.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* – Seen in small numbers on freshwater throughout the trip.



Jeff Hayward





PARTRIDGES, PHEASANTS, AND ALLIES

Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta* – This common yet often hard-to-see bird was just that...hard to see! Seen only twice but all of us got good looks at one bird on the entrance road to the Kast Guesthouse.

Grebes

Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* – We saw good numbers in beautiful breeding plumage on freshwater ponds.

PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*— Not abundant but we saw some near Reykjavik, and ones and twos away from cities.

OYSTERCATCHERS: Haematopodidae

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*— Common to abundant in fields and pastures near the coast, often calling in fight. On the entrance road to the Kast Guesthouse, we were treated to great looks at adults with fledglings.

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS

Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* – This beautiful cousin to the North American golden-plovers were widespread in small numbers in grassy areas.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* – Ilana found the first one after dinner near the Kast Guesthouse and we saw more near rocky shorelines and mudflats the next day, and another high up during our north to south crossing of the island.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* – Common and seen most days.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* – Perhaps the most conspicuous shorebird, we saw singles and pairs or more of this colorful bird at multiple locations most days in grassy fields at wet pastures. Their black-and-white wings made them easy to identify while in fight.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*— Seen in their preferred rocky shoreline habitat on our second morning on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* – One large flock near Borgarnes on our drive from Reykjavik to the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, and again not far from the Kast Guesthouse the next day. Many of us see Dunlin in winter plumage in the U.S., so it was a treat to see them in breeding plumage.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* – We saw these in two spots on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula including at least 20 on the small beach after dinner in Snæfellsbær, mixed in with Common Ringed Plover and Common Redshank.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* – Common near grassy fields and pastures, often heard winnowing while in fight.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* – Common in ponds and lakes, usually actively feeding in their wind-up-toy way.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* – Abundant, often calling from fence posts along the road.



SKUAS AND JAEGER

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*- Unfortunately, only a quick flyby was seen by Mason and maybe one other in the group at Dyrhólaey.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus* – Seen in ones and twos patrolling wetlands and open fields including a mix of dark and light-morph birds.

Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus* – This was one of the rare/hard-to-see treats that Daniel found during the magical evening when we drove up into the hills before returning to our hotel near Akureyri.



AUKS, MURRES, AND PUFFINS

Common Murre *Uria aalge* — Seen a handful of times including hundreds on cliffs and in the water near the beautiful orange lighthouse at Svörtuloft.

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia* — At least a few mixed in with the Razorbills and Common Murres at Svörtuloft, giving us a good side-by-side comparison with Common Murre.

Razorbill *Alca torda* — Dozens or more at Svörtuloft.

Black Guillemot *Cepphus 5rille* — One or two at Grundarfjörðu and Arnarstapi, and more at the rocky cliffs at Dyrhólaey.

Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula artica* — After seeing many at a distance at Grundarfjörðu and Arnarstapi, we finally got very close looks at Leila's favorite bird at Dyrhólaey.

GULLS AND TERNS: Laridae

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*— Seen on several days including at least 1,000 at Arnarstapi.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*— Seen on several days but most common in the ponds on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula where they were nesting.

Common Gull *Larus canus*— More than two dozen at Norourlandsvegur.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*— Seen on six days including near Reykjavik, at Borgarnes, Selfoss, and at the lighthouse at Garður.

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*— One at harbor in Grundarfjörðu before lunch.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*— One of the most common gulls with many surfing the high winds on our last day before heading to the airport.

Glaucous Gull *Laurs hyperboreus*— Seen at several locations on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula and again at Dyrhólaey.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* — Seen in good numbers around the Snæfellsnes Peninsula and other stops near saltwater.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* — We saw one of this Icelandic rarity at the ponds at Lon.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* — At least 1,000 of these beautiful long-distance travelers around the island including many nesting.



Jeff Hayward





LOONS: Gaviidae

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata* — Several in freshwater ponds including one on a nest at the Flói Bird Reserve.

Arctic Loon *Gavia arctica* — We had decent scope views of this difficult to find species at the Vestmannsvatn wetlands.

Common Loon *Gavia immer* — Fairly common including an adult with chicks riding on its back at the Vestmannsvatn wetlands.

PETRELS AND SHEARWATERS: Procellariidae

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* — Another abundant species, with hundreds perched high on most ocean cliffs and great close-up views during our whale watching trip off Ólafsvík.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* — We saw about 50 zooming above the waves in high winds at the Garður lighthouse on our last day before heading to the airport.

GANNETS AND BOOBIES: Sulidae

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* — First seen at Búðir on our first full day and then larger numbers on our last two days along the coast. We also saw at least a handful that likely succumbed to avian influenza.

CORMORANTS: Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* — Four at Eyrarbakki harbor.

European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* — Several at Arnarstapi.

HAWKS, KITES AND EAGLES: Accipitridae

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* — We were fortunate to see this giant eagle on three days including our first birding stop after airport pickups. This species, once nearly extirpated in Iceland, is still threatened so location details are closely held.

OWLS: Strigidae

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* — Seen twice, once midday near Norourlandsvegur and again the same day as we returned to our lodge near Akureyri.

FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae

Merlin *Falco columbarius* — One on the high cliffs above the pond at Vatnajökull National Park (Asbyrgi).

Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus* — We were fortunate to see two different birds on the same day, one high on a cliff near Mývatn Lake, and a second that gave us closer looks perched and in flight during our magical evening before returning to Akureyri.

Crows and Jays: Corvidae

Common Raven *Corvus corax* — Fairly common around Snæfellsnes Peninsula and elsewhere.

KINGLETS: Regulidae

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*— We caught glimpses of this relative of the Golden-crowned Kinglet in the small woods at Hofstaðaskógur, and then had great looks at the Skógar village on our second to last day.

WRENS: Troglodytidae

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* — Good looks at two at Kjarnaskógur forest near Akureyri.

STARLINGS AND MYNAS: Sturnidae

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*— Seen mostly near towns and cities.

THRUSHES: Turdidae

Redwing *Turdus iliacus* – The most common songbird, this striking thrush was seen every day of the tour in a variety of habitats.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula* – We heard the lovely song and caught glimpses at Kjarnaskógur forest and then got good looks at Skógar on our second to last day.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* – We were fortunate to see at least four of this uncommon breeding bird at Kjarnaskógur forest near Akureyri.

OLD WORLD FLYCATCHES AND CHATS: Muscicapidae

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* – We saw a few of these in rocky areas around the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

PIPITS AND WAGTAILS: Motacillidae

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* – Common and widespread, often giving us close looks.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* – Another common and widespread bird, seen in many grassy fields.

FINCHES AND EUPHONIAS: Fringillidae

Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea* – Seen twice, first at the small woods at Hofstaðaskógur and again at Kjarnaskógur.

LONGSPURS AND SNOW BUNTINGS: Calcariidae

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* — We saw two during our north to south drive across the central highlands.



MAMMALS:

Orca *Orcinus orca* – We saw several of these magnificent animals including young calves during our boat trip off Ólafsvík.

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Daniel Bergmann – DB), Whooper Swan (Jeff Hayward – JH), Common Eider (Mason Flint – MF), Tufted Duck (MF), Red-throated Loon (MF), Eurasian Oystercatcher (MF), Common Ringed Plover (MF), Common Redshank (MF), Red-necked Phalarope (MF), Long-tailed Jaeger (MF), Atlantic Puffin (MF), Black-headed Gull (JH), Northern Fulmar (MF), Great Black-backed Gull (MF), Black-legged Kittiwake (MF), Common Redpoll (MF), White Wagtail (MF), Goldcrest (MF).