

Iceland Birding & Nature | Trip Report

June 13 – 23, 2023 | by Dave Mehlman



With guides **Daniel Bergmann** and **Dave Mehlman** and participants: **Brenda, Candice, Daphne, John, Mark, Merri, Paul, Peter, Sandra, Susan, Tim A., and Tim J.**



“What part of Eyjafjallajökull don’t you understand?”

Tues., June 13

Arrivals | Reykjavík | Snæfellsnes Peninsula

Mark, Merri, Paul, Susan, John, Candice, Tim J., and Dave had arrived a day or two early to enjoy some free time (and time zone acclimatization!) in Reykjavík before the tour started. Early in the morning, Daniel very kindly drove out to Keflavík Airport to pick up Brenda, Daphne, Paul, Sandra, and Tim A. who arrived at various times that morning. The earliest arrivals were treated to a quick trip out to the end of the Reykjanes Peninsula at the Garðskagi lighthouse for some birding while waiting for the later arriving flights. After all arrivals were accounted for, Daniel headed into Reykjavík to pick up the city people at the Ráðhúsið bus stop near the center of town. After performing the first of many luggage loadings, Daniel drove the group to the nearby Bakkatjörn (a small lake in the Seltjarnarnes neighborhood) to kick off our birding and wildlife adventure in Iceland!

This proved to be a great first stop, with a wide variety of aquatic birds that we would become very familiar with during the days to come. The gulls provided a quick primer in the identification of Iceland’s gulls, with Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed, Glaucous, Herring, and Black-headed all present. May of the common



waterfowl were around, too, such as Whooper Swan, Graylag Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, and Red-breasted Merganser; a kind of out of place Pink-footed Goose added to our initial haul of species. The shorebirds put in their requisite appearance, with Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit, and Red-necked Phalaropes all being close by. This great start had also warmed up everyone's appetite, so we drove to the nearby Nings Restaurant in Reykjavík for lunch and then continued to the north and west.

After driving through the long tunnel under the Hvalfjörður, we stopped briefly at the south end of the bridge over the Borgarfjörður to see what was out and about in the bigger waters of the fjord. Although pretty quiet, we spotted a few Common Ringed Plovers on the sand, Great Cormorant and Northern Fulmar out on the water, and had our first Parasitic Jaeger fly by. We continued onward, gradually working our way west along the south side of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. We stopped at a place called Ytri Tunga (seal beach) to look for seals and birds (and a bunch of people had the same idea, at least for the seals!). This excellent site on the ocean indeed had a few Harbor Seals lounging about, complemented by lots of Common Eider (adults of both sexes and many downy chicks), Whimbrel and Common Snipe flying over the grassy uplands, and, in a nearby pond, some Northern Shovelers (the only ones of the tour), Tufted Ducks, and four Barnacle Geese (also the only ones of the tour as most have migrated from this part of Iceland by June). We then stopped at the nearby Lýsuvatn (a large pond very near our guesthouse), but could not find much of interest outside the normal Tufted Ducks and Greater Scaup. We then continued a short way off the highway to the Kast Guesthouse, our home for the next three nights and dramatically set against some high, glacially carved cliffs. This was followed by our inaugural dinner of the tour and then our first night in this land where it never did get dark at night for the entire two weeks!

Wed., June 14 Whale Watching from Ólafsvík | Snæfellsnes Peninsula

We started the day with a tasty buffet breakfast at Kast Guesthouse, then loaded into our Sprinter Van for the drive to the north shore of the Snæfellsnes, our first destination being the town of Ólafsvík. On the outskirts of town, we made a short stop at a small pond since Daniel knew of a nesting Red-throated Loon there. After a bit of searching, we spotted the loon on its nest, semi-hidden in the grass and surrounded by colorful wildflowers—



we all complemented that bird on its interior decorating skills! The loon was supplemented by the “usual suspects” such as Tufted Duck, Arctic Tern, and Red-necked Phalarope. After this stop, we went over to the nearby boat dock in the harbor to prepare for our whale watching trip.

Prior to boarding our boat, the Iris, we and other passengers were given a full set of insulated, waterproof coveralls to put on over our clothes to provide extra protection from the weather. Although the weather was pretty spectacular, with mostly clear, sunny skies, the extra layers did help against the cold breeze. We then all got on board, along with a large number of other passengers, and set off on about a three-hour boat trip out into the Breiðafjörður, the large body of water that separates the Snæfellsnes from the Westfjords to the north. Most of the group headed to the top deck with Daniel to keep our eyes constantly peeled for wildlife, though the boat had a naturalist and spotter on board to help out. The outstanding highlight of the tour was sightings of at least four different Sperm Whales as they loafed and spouted on the surface before beginning their deep foraging dives. One was quite close to the boat, providing super observing and photo opportunities of this large animal. The birds were quite interesting, too, though requiring some diligence to spot and pick out on or over the ocean. Northern Fulmar and Black-legged Kittiwake were constantly flying around as were a few Northern Gannets. As we proceeded, we began to readily see flying and sitting Atlantic Puffins, Common Murres, and Razorbills. Near the harbor when leaving and returning we found an Iceland Gull and some European Shags while a Black Guillemot or two swam by. Returning to the dock, we got back on shore, turned in our coveralls, and then proceeded to the nearby Sker Restaurant in Ólafsvík for a well-deserved lunch. Definitely a fantastic and fun trip and one of the highlights of the tour for many.

After lunch, we continued our explorations of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula by driving west on the main road. Near the small town of Rif, we visited the Tjarnir pond in search of a Lesser Scaup that Daniel had found there a few weeks earlier. With some careful searching with bins and our scopes, Daniel picked out the Scaup, a North American rarity in Iceland, among the many Tufted Ducks present. In addition to these species, the ponds had Eurasian Teal (called Green-winged Teal by some), Dunlin, Red-breasted Merganser, and White Wagtail.

Continuing our explorations, we entered the enormous and fascinating lava field at the very west tip of the Snæfellsnes. This vast landscape, with its rugged lava beds covered with deep layers of mosses and lichens,



made a strong impression on most of us. We stopped at the location known as Svörtuloft at the edge of the ocean, where the lava ends in steep cliffs perfect for nesting seabirds. Although the weather at this point became a bit cold, windy, and wet, we could stand at the top of the cliffs and pick out the various nesting species in their various strata from high to low: Northern Fulmar, Black-legged Kittiwake, Common Murre (Guillemot), Thick-billed Murre (Brünnich's Guillemot), and Razorbill. Those with careful eyes for detail also picked out a few of the Bridled form of Common Murre mixed in with the "normal" forms; the Bridled form increases in frequency at higher latitudes in the Arctic. It became a bit late in the day and the time came to head back to our Guesthouse. On the way out, we spotted an Arctic Fox rambling over the lava fields to add a bit of animal diversity to our tour list, along with a Northern Wheatear, some flying Rock Ptarmigans, and European Golden-Plover. As we continued our way back, we spotted two Parasitic Jaegers (Arctic Skuas) perched out on the lava to highlight this excellent day. Arriving back at Kast, we had a short break, followed by dinner and our daily checklist, then off to our rooms for the "evening."

Thurs., June 15 Snæfellsnes Peninsula

We started the day with another fine buffet breakfast at Kast Guesthouse, then loaded our gear in the van for another full day exploring the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. Though it was very foggy and a it rainy on the south side of the Peninsula, we were headed to the north side, which Daniel suspected would have better weather. It turned out he was indeed correct, and at our first stop at the Búlandshöfði overlook, we enjoyed some nice sunny weather. The view over the ocean was spectacular with many of the typical birds of the coastal area to be seen: European Shag, Great Cormorant, Common Eider, and a couple of Harlequin Ducks. We then proceeded east along the north coast to the town of Stykkishólmur (Daniel's home town!), making stops at Grundarfjörður (opposite the scenic Kirkjufell mountain), driving around the Kolgrafafjörður in a vain search for White-tailed Eagle, and across the lava flow at Hraunsfjörður. A few highlight birds during the morning were our first Purple Sandpipers of the tour (indeed, a very poorly named species, at least in breeding plumage!), Northern Wheatear, and Meadow Pipit.

At the end of the morning, we drove down a short dirt road to a delightful forest plantation called Skógræktarfélag for a picnic lunch in the pines and birches under warm, sunny skies. As we feasted on our hand-made sandwiches, we noted Redwings, Goldcrests, and Common Snipe. After this fun break in our normal restaurant lunch routine, we headed a bit north toward the Stykkishólmur harbor where we saw an exhibit of some of Daniel's bird photos at the Norwegian House. After this brief cultural interlude, we then took a short

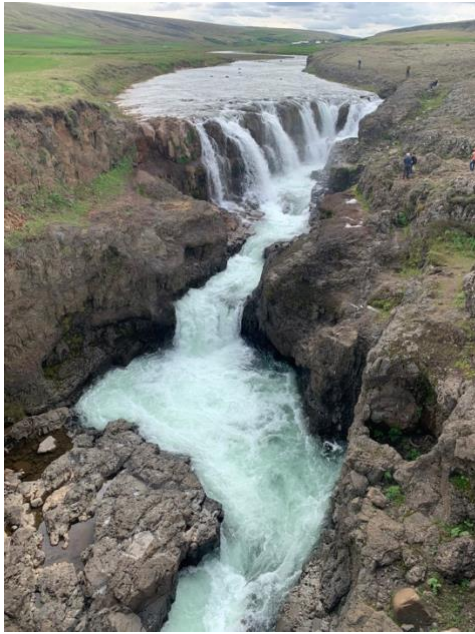


walk to a trail to climb to the nearby Ségandisey lighthouse, perched atop a small hill. More fabulous views awaited us there, along with a few birds in the waters, including Atlantic Puffin, Black Guillemot, Black-legged Kittiwake, and, for a lucky few, a poor sighting of a very far off, flying White-tailed Eagle.

After the hike, we continued our way east and south to complete a loop back to the Kast Guesthouse. During the afternoon, Daniel showed us a White-tailed Eagle on a nest at a far, but easily viewable distance—its precise location shall remain undisclosed! On our way back to the Guesthouse, after reaching the south shore of the Peninsula, we stopped again at Ytri Tunga since Daniel had received a report of a King Eider on the beach there. Right after we arrived, Daniel indeed spotted said eider, and we all rapidly walked closer to get a look at this elegant bird. It was a full, breeding plumaged male resting on the shore! So everyone got their ultimate looks at this handsome species; for good measure, lots of Common Eiders were roosting on the beach, too, allowing for awesome views and photos of both species. While there, we also had good opportunities to study Purple Sandpiper, Dunlin, and Common Ringed Plover to complement what we had seen at this site earlier. Since we still had a bit of time left in the afternoon, we stopped again at Lýsuvátn to see if anything different was there. It was our lucky afternoon as a bit of viewing revealed one Common Pochard floating in the pond among the Tufted Ducks and Greater Scaup, along with some Common Loons (Great Northern Divers), to add to our bird list. We then returned to the Guesthouse for a short break, dinner, and bird list to wrap up another fine day in Iceland.

Fri., June 16 Drive to Akureyri

Today was our last morning at Kast Guesthouse, so we had our usual buffet breakfast, then packed our van and took our seats for what was to be mostly a travel day. We retraced our route back to the east end of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula and all the way to Borgarnes, then headed northeasterly toward our final destination for the day outside the town of Akureyri. We stopped for lunch in Blönduós and arrived at our destination for the next several days, Lamb Inn Guesthouse in Öngulsstaðir (about 10 km south of Akureyri) about 4:00 PM. After getting settled in, most of the group then agreed to join Daniel on a late afternoon outing to Kjarnaskógur, a wooded area in the hills just outside of Akureyri. Oddly, the woods were very quiet, though we did see Redwing,



Goldcrest, and Common Redpoll. We then returned to Lamb Inn for a rest and dinner, and then off to bed for the “evening.”

Sat., June 17 Vestmannsvatn | Mývatn

We began the day with buffet breakfast, then loaded all our gear into the van for a full field day. Although the primary destination for the day was Mývatn (Iceland’s fourth largest body of water), we started with a short detour to search for more birds on a side road heading to Húsavík. At another secure, undisclosed location that Daniel knew, we were privileged to spot a pair of Gyrfalcons sitting and flying about a rugged cliff face, where they were apparently nesting (or had nested in the past). Given that Daniel had mentioned to us a very drastic decline in Gyrfalcon numbers in Iceland this year, apparently due to avian flu, we felt lucky to see these majestic birds at any distance. We then continued a bit further north to do some birding at Vestmannsvatn, a large lake right by the road. Breaking out our bins and scopes, Daniel quickly found the target bird here: a breeding plumaged Arctic Loon (Black-throated Diver), apparently the only one in Iceland! This bird was complemented by its more common relative, the Common Loon (Great Northern Diver), Whooper Swan, Graylag Goose, Horned Grebe, Common Ringed Plover, and a few Gadwall.

After the morning action, we continued to the highlight destination of the day: Mývatn. Our first stop at this vast lake was the Kálfaströnd section, an area of water and lava flows—fantastic scenery and birds. The highlights here included several Barrow’s Goldeneye, a few Eurasian (Green-winged) Teal at very close range, Whimbrel, and Common Snipe. We next took a lunch break at a nearby restaurant, then headed back out for more birding. Our next stop was Neslandavík frá fuglasafni (the bird museum) where we were able to dig out a few Common Scoter and Long-tailed Ducks in the ponds among hordes of Tufted Ducks and Eurasian Wigeon. A Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua), Horned Grebes, Red-breasted Mergansers, and a Meadow Pipit added to the fun here.

We then moved on to the Laxá River, which flows out of Mývatn, to explore some fast-flowing river water habitat. We were able to find a few Harlequin Ducks here, including one female snoozing away amid the rushing water, along with some very close-range Barrow’s Goldeneyes and Long-tailed Ducks. Meanwhile, the usual complement of Whimbrel, European Golden-Plover, and more Parasitic Jaegers flew by—the birding just never



stopped around Mývatn! At this point, it was beginning to get late in the day, so we started our trip back to the guesthouse, making the obligatory stop at Goðafoss on the trip to admire this amazing waterfall later at a time when the morning tour crowds had subsided. We got back to the Lamb Inn in time for a short rest, followed by dinner and then our daily checklist, concluding another successful day.

Sun., June 18 Laxárgljúfur | Kaldbakstjarnir | Ásbyrgi | Kópasker | Mývatn

Daniel decided to take us a bit further afield in northern Iceland today in search of more great scenery and birds. So, after breakfast, we loaded all our gear for a full day in the field, climbed in the Sprinter, and headed off to the north. Our first stop was Laxárgljúfur where a hydropower complex has been built that impounds water from the Laxá River and generates electricity. We spent a few hours here, birding along the river and in the canyon both below and above the dam. A great highlight here was a pair of Merlin, which perched cooperatively for us for good scope looks on the cliffs before flying off. Also a treat were several Common Mergansers (Goosanders) in the stream bed, the only ones of the tour. Many more usual species were present as well, including Tufted Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Snipe, and Black-tailed Godwit. We then continued to the nearby site of Daufhylur where an impressive flock of over 50 Barrow's Goldeneyes, mostly males, was present in a river along with a lone Northern Pintail female.

We then drove north along the coastal road almost to the town of Húsavík where we stopped at Kaldbakstjarnir, a large pond beside the road with a bird hide (blind) since Daniel had some reports of good birds there. After a bit of searching, Daniel picked out the Eurasian Coot that was present which eventually swam out into full view and even sat on the shore, allowing for great scope views of its large white frontal shield (although, TBH, it does kind of look like an American Coot, IMHO!). Also present were the usual contingent of Black-headed Gulls, Arctic Terns, and Graylag Goose. At this point, it was the middle of the day, so we headed into Húsavík for some surprisingly good "fast food" at the N1 station in town.

After lunch, we continued driving north and east around the headland to the west of the Öxarfjörður, stopping at one point at a roadside overlook which had a puffin colony right next door. The ocean views were dramatic, but aside from fabulous Atlantic Puffin watching, we could only find a Eurasian Wren, lots of Northern Fulmar, and Common Eiders floating in the water. We then proceeded to drive across the vast, flat silt plain of the



outflow of the Jökulsá á Fjöllum River, the second longest in Iceland, to Ásbyrgi Canyon. This incredible, horseshoe-shaped canyon has sheer walls up to 100 m in height and was apparently carved by catastrophic flooding of the Jökulsá á Fjöllum River several thousand years ago after a glacial dam burst suddenly. In technical terms, this type of flood is called a jökulhlaup, or Glacial Lake Outburst Flood. Ásbyrgi is part of Vatnajökull National Park and, in addition to the geologic scenery, has a lovely birch forest in its bottom and a small pond at its southern end called Botnstjörn. We drove to the end of the canyon and took a short hike through the birch forest to the pond. Though not a large number of species were seen, we had great fun watching a male Barrow's Goldeneye fly back and forth in front of us, very agitated, in response to Daniel's playing a recording. We also had very good looks at a singing Eurasian Wren in the birches, plus extremely close-up views of foraging Red-necked Phalaropes and a female Eurasian Wigeon right off the platform at the Botnstjörn. After our hike, we returned to the highway for a brief stop at the Park Visitor Center to learn more about this fascinating area.

Since we had time left in the afternoon, we continued a bit further north along the coast highway, stopping at the pond called Núpasveit near the small community of Presthólalón, again because Daniel had received reports of some interesting birds there. Upon arrival, we were greeted by huge numbers of Black-headed Gulls and Arctic Terns flying over the pond. However, careful watching by "eagle-eye" Daniel found the reported Little Gull flying with them at the far end of the pond for a brief sighting. Not many in the group got on it in time, but for those who did, it was a great bird! Also present were a lot of Greater Scaup, two Long-tailed Ducks, a few Red-throated Loons, and some foraging Snow Buntings. We then continued a bit further north to the fishing village of Kópasker to make our final stop of the day (and northernmost point of the trip, about 66.3° North latitude) in the harbor. As we arrived in the harbor a Great Skua flew by, but it happened so rapidly that many in the group did not see it. Searching the rocky shores by the harbor, we found a Ruddy Turnstone in breeding plumage, many Common Eider, and a large flock of Common Gulls roosting.

At that point, we turned around and began our return trip to Akureyri via Mývatn. Coming in to Mývatn from the east, we passed by the large thermal fields with their geothermal power generating plants and lots of steam. As luck would have it, as we drove by the lake's lava formations, a lovely Gyrfalcon was perched right on the rocks by the road—best...possible...view...ever! We then went to Hotel Mývatn for a great dinner then finally

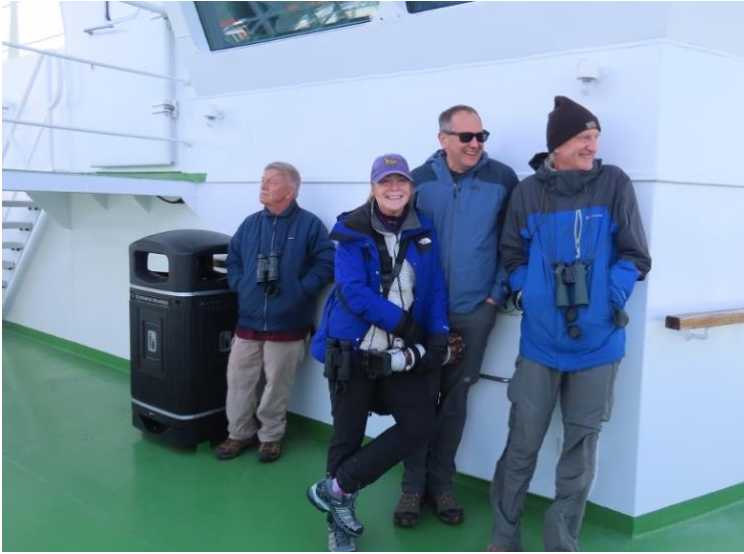


arrived back at Lamb Inn around 9:00pm. Along the final bit of road into the Guesthouse, since we were so late in the day, we all kept a close eye peeled over the fields in hopes of spotting a Short-eared Owl or two (which Daniel had seen two days earlier on a trip into town), but we could not find one. Another satisfying day in Iceland had ended, though, again in pure daylight!

Mon., June 19 Hveravellir | Gullfoss

Unfortunately, today marked the end of our stay at the peaceful Lamb Inn, so we dug into one more buffet breakfast, did final organizing of our things, then recreated the jigsaw puzzle of packing the van one more time (actually, Daniel did that!). Then, we were off for a long travel day from north to south Iceland over the interior of the country via the F35 road. After about 3.5 hours, we arrived at our first destination in the trip, Hveravellir. Naturally, the first thing we did was have lunch, after, of course, taking in the very cooperative Snow Bunting perching on top of the welcome sign. Entering the small facility there, we took off our shoes (as any proper Icelander would) then sat down and enjoyed a delicious bowl of fish soup. After lunch, we had a bit of time to explore the area, so most took a quick walk through the thermal area on the boardwalk, taking in a variety of hot pots, fumaroles, and extremely mini-geysers.

This road took us through some of the highest elevations of the tour, reaching near 700 m elevation, as we crossed from the north, through the high country, and descended into the south. The landscapes here were vast, with distant views of far-off peaks and glaciers; little vegetation was present for most of the trip and few birds, except for the occasional Snow Bunting, Common Redshank, and a few small flocks of flying Pink-footed Geese. The road travels between Langjökull and Hofsjökull, Iceland's second and third largest glaciers, respectively, and passes by a series of dammed lakes which are used to generate hydropower. Continuing, we began to descend from the interior and the landscape gradually became more vegetated (and populated). Our last stop of the day was Gullfoss, one of the better-known waterfalls in Iceland. We stopped in at the very crowded visitor center and then most took a short walk down the excellent trails to get closer views of this amazing force of nature and Daniel picked everyone up in the lower parking lot. After this, we continued straight to our destination for the next several days, the Strætó Hotel in Hella, where we went over plans for the next day and gorged ourselves on the buffet dinner. Then, off to our rooms to prepare for a much-anticipated outing the following day.



Tue., June 20 Vestmannaeyjar (Westmans' Islands)

We started the day with a big buffet breakfast at the Stracta (though the coffee line was pretty competitive with all the other tour groups staying there) and then loaded up in the van for a full day in the field on the Vestmannaeyjar (Westmans' Islands). After a short, 30-minute, drive, we arrived at the ferry landing to see the impressive Herjólfur at the dock with its bow up, ready for loading. Daniel drove the van onto the boat while the rest of us boarded through the passenger walkway. Once underway, we quickly figured out the best places to stand, at least for those who wanted to be out on the deck, which were near the bow in the lee of the wind. The ride was about 40 minutes, the ocean pretty calm with a shallow swell, and the scenery was awesome as we approached the main Island of Heimaey (the largest of the archipelago) and its dramatic cliffs. Diligent deck observers spotted a couple of Great Skuas and Manx Shearwaters flying by, though the latter were tricky to pick out with all the Northern Fulmars present. Some Atlantic Puffins and Northern Gannets were spotted, too, to make the trip interesting.

Upon arrival, we disembarked and then were picked up by Daniel and headed to our first stop, the puffin colony observation blind (hide) on the Stórhöfði peninsula (reputedly the windiest place in Europe!). It was great fun observing the constant activity and coming and going of the Atlantic Puffins at this site as they gossiped (?) about puffin-world events, came in and out of their burrows, and launched themselves off the steep hillsides to land in the water below. Great photo ops for some and definitely a spot that one could spend a lot of time watching puffin behavior. A Great Skua flew by at one point and a few of what were presumably real, wild Rock Doves (as opposed to the feral Rock Pigeon found in cities) were around, along with a cooperative Meadow Pipit.

After having had our fill here (and sentencing more than a few pixels to death!), we drove over to the opposite side of the main harbor to look at the ocean side, where there were outflows from fish-packing plants in the water. The outflows attracted an enormous concentration of Northern Fulmar, most of which were floating in the water, engaging in a feeding frenzy on the bits of fish present, and spinning constantly around, looking a bit like enormous phalaropes. Also present in the area were several Black Guillemot, Common Murre, many gulls, a White Wagtail, and a Common Loon. After this fun viewing, we returned to the main harbor for a very nice lunch at a restaurant there.

After lunch, we drove back to the top of the Stórhöfði and most of the group took the opportunity to walk up to the lighthouse and explore the scenic views of this dramatic spot, though the wind kept the birding to a



minimum. We then returned to the puffin blind only to find almost no puffins visible at this time in the afternoon! Although surprising to us, Daniel confirmed that this seems to be normally the case: the mornings are quite active, but the afternoons are very quiet with the puffins either in the burrows or out at sea foraging. A Parasitic Jaeger did fly by as a sort of consolation prize, however. At this point, our time on the Vestmannaeyjar was up, so we got in the van and drove back to town for a bit of final exploring of the harbor, parts of which were almost destroyed by a volcanic eruption in 1973 from what is now known as Eldfell. We then repeated the ferry ride in reverse, again enjoying a short, lovely ride. This time, Daphne and Dave, diligently observing on deck, saw a pair of Harbor Porpoises to add another species to our small mammal list. Arriving on the mainland, we disembarked and returned to the Stracta for a short rest followed by dinner at the hotel and another night's rest.

Wed., June 21 Þingvellir National Park | Flói Bird Reserve

Today, our last full field day, began with a leisurely start and the normal buffet breakfast at the Stracta. While a few in the group decided to take the day off, so to speak, the rest loaded in the van with Daniel for more exploration of southwest Iceland. Our destination for the morning was Þingvellir National Park, one of Iceland's major tourist attractions and a well-known stop on the Golden Circle tourist route. While the Park is quite lovely, it has two main subjects of interest for the foreign visitor: it is the site of Iceland's (and presumably the world's) first parliament and it is located on the rift between the tectonic plates of North America and Europe. Daniel dropped the group off at the main visitor center and then Dave led everyone on a short walk through the Park to where Daniel had parked the van. Although there indeed were hordes of tourists from everywhere, we admired the great views of the lava flows, rifts, streams, and the Þingvallavatn and managed to get some fine bird sightings, in particular a Eurasian Wren, a group of 25 Harlequin Ducks roosting in a stream, and a close-range Rock Ptarmigan (which flew in as we were waiting to get back on the van!). Finishing our visit here, we drove to the nearby town of Selfoss for a great lunch, including pizza for some. After lunch, we made a quick stop at Eyrarbakki on the nearby coast but did not find anything of interest. We then continued to our primary birding spot for the afternoon: Friðlandið í Flóa (Flói Bird Reserve). This reserve is managed by BirdLife Iceland (Fluglavernd) in cooperation with the local municipality's government and has an observing blind and some trails through the wet grasslands. We spent about an hour exploring the Reserve, including time in the blind and walking the trails. There appeared, as Daniel had advertised, to be a pair of Red-throated Loons on every pond

in the reserve (and there were a lot of ponds!), and we enjoyed our usual friends such as Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Redshank, Common Snipe, Whimbrel, Parasitic Jaeger, and European Golden-Plover. After finishing here, we drove back to the Stracta for some free time to begin packing before our final buffet dinner of the tour.

Thu., June 22 Return to Reykjavík & Departures

We began our last day of the tour with a final buffet breakfast at Stracta, watching the amazing demonstrations of skill (or lack thereof!) at the waffle-making station. After organizing all our things, we assembled by the van in front of the hotel, then packed everything in for one last time. Given that all the flights out were in the afternoon, we had some time in the morning for some last birding stops, so off we went to the west and the Reykjanes Peninsula outside of Reykjavík. Our first stop was just outside Selfoss (an oddly named town, since there was no “foss” nearby) at Ræsi along the Ölfusá River where Daniel had a lead on some good birds. Since we had kept our bins and scopes accessible, we put all eyes on the water and, among a large flock of Tufted Ducks and a few Greater Scaup, Daniel picked out another Common Pochard and another Lesser Scaup. Though the Pochard was different enough that it could be easily spotted, many had a tough time picking out the Scaup in the middle of the crowd, a task made harder by the fact that all the ducks were constantly diving, as they are wont to do. Also present were Eurasian (Green-winged) Teal, Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, and Common Ringed Plover on the mudflats and a White Wagtail in the uplands.

We then continued west to the Garðskagi, at the far northwestern tip of the Reykjanes, which is a well-known birding spot not far from Keflavík and the airport. Although a bit windy, there was an enormous flock of Black-legged Kittiwakes standing on the rocks by the lighthouse and a constant stream of Northern Fulmar with a few Manx Shearwaters mixed in for the diligent observer. All complemented by the usual Oystercatchers, Eiders, Northern Gannets, and other gull species. A fun and appropriate way to end our tour, we finished there, loaded into the van, and drove into Keflavík town for our last lunch as a tour group. Daniel then took us all to the airport and we dropped off the eight members of the group who had afternoon flights and we wished each other a hearty góða ferð (or would have, if we could speak Icelandic!) and said our good-byes. Daniel then kindly took the remaining few, who had flights the next day or were staying on, to their destinations in close by Keflavík and he was then free to roam about the island until his next tour. And that was the end of the fabulous Naturalist Journeys Iceland 2023 tour!

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Daniel Bergmann – DB), King Eider (Brenda Day - BD), Snow Bunting (BD), Horses (BD), Atlantic Puffin (Peter Weitzman - PW), Northern Gannet (BD), Common Eider (Susan Robinson - SR), SpermWhale Tail (Mark Hinton - MH), Group on Boat (MH), Horses (BD), Daniel Bergmann getting the shot (MH), Peering through binoculars (MH), Arctic Fox (MH), Svörtuloft Scenic (DM), Stunning Landscapes (MH), Kirkjufell Scenic (MH), Horses (Brenda), Glaucous Gull (Brenda), Purple Sandpiper (NJ Stock), Eurasian Oystercatcher (BD), Kolugijufur Waterfall (DM), Tufted Duck (PW), Group Birdwatching (SR), Eurasian (Green-winged) Teal (PW), Birdwatching (SR), Horned Grebe (BD), Redwing (DM), Barrow's Goldeneye (BD), Lupine & Red Campion (SR), Red-necked Phalarope (BD), Graylag Goose (BD), Atlantic Puffin (BD), Paul & Susan (SR), Atlantic Puffin (BD), Herjolfur Ferry (Merri Rudd), Sandra and Tim (DM), Thingvellir (DM), Harlequin Duck (BD), European Golden-Plover (BD), Common Redshank (BD), Red-throated Loon (PW), Parasitic Jaeger(BD),