ITINERARY

ICELAND

Tour I: June 27-July 6, 2018
Tour II: July 6-15, 2018

We include here information for those interested in the 2018 Field Guides Iceland tour:

— a general introduction to the tour
— a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
— an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day’s birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

— an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year’s Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings
— a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
— a reading list
— a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
— after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Iceland is a place of great topographic beauty and has a tumultuous history to match its sublime geography—the violent, elegant sagas of the Vikings seem of a piece with the abundance of active volcanoes, great glaciers, and shining fjords. The island brims with birdlife. The fluting songs of Icelandic Whimbrels mix with the mournful notes of European Golden-Plovers to provide unforgettable accompaniment to a landscape that was the last home of the Great Auk, a landscape that seems to have been built by giants. An abundance of picturesque landscapes, combined with remarkably cooperative breeding birds on territory, translates to fabulous photo opportunities. Check out our slideshow to see for yourself: https://fieldguides.smugmug.com/SHOWS/Europe-Africa/Iceland-2015/

The charming Atlantic Puffin breeds on the rocky Latrabjarg cliffs along with many other alcids, plus kittiwakes, and fulmars. We’ll visit the cliffs, and see this amazing spectacle up close. Photo by guide Eric Hynes.
kittiwakes, with a chance at Great Skuas and Parasitic Jaegers patrolling above. Remarkable numbers of waterfowl, of some sixteen species, nest on and around Myvatn, a lake unrivaled in Europe.

Between these nurseries of bird life, we'll look for about seventy nesting species, some Palearctic in distribution, such as White-tailed Eagle, Redwing, Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail, Common Redshank, European Golden-Plover, Pink-footed Goose, European Shag, and Common Ringed Plover, and others on the eastern limit of their Nearctic range: Common Loon, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Harlequin Duck. To see these birds with newly hatched young is a peerless experience.

The world’s largest falcon, the Gyrfalcon, is Iceland's national bird and ghostly, light morph individuals are uncommon but widespread across the north. Iceland's endemics include taxa of Black-tailed Godwit, Rock Ptarmigan, Common Raven, Common Redpoll, Redwing, Eurasian Wren, and Merlin, some of which show marked differences from continental forms.

Several aspects of our itinerary are important to point out as no other bird tour of Iceland offers this combination of essential features. We will be traveling in a comfortable, 30-seater bus with a professional driver. We will have ample room to spread out, elevated seating for better views through huge windows, and your guide will be free to scan for birds instead of keeping his eyes glued to the shoulder-less roads. Spending the first night in downtown Reykjavik at an upscale hotel really aids in the physical transition to a new time zone after lengthy travel. It also puts us just a couple of blocks from critical birding areas in the city. The modern structures and cultural aspects of the capital city are not to be missed and will come into sharp contrast from the wild landscapes during the rest of the tour. Our brief in-country flight (cost included) is picturesque, a serious timesaver, and means we will not have to do any backtracking. We will enjoy another full birding day instead of being stuck in the bus retracing our route. The sublime beauty of the West Fjords region cannot be overstated, and the birding aspects are spectacular. The rugged and remote landscapes are awe-inspiring, and the seabird cliffs are astonishing. This region also provides some of our best opportunities to spot White-tailed Eagle and Gyrfalcon. We savor this portion of Iceland, while others barely touch the area or skip it all together. Finally, our last afternoon in country will feature the freshest seafood possible. During a short cruise the crew will trawl for shellfish while getting up close and personal with nesting European Shags and Black-legged Kittiwakes.

The pace of the tour will allow us to savor more than just the fantastic birds. Don't be surprised if waterfalls, fjords, mountains, or a whale distracts us. For those arriving a day or more early, the capital abounds in shopping and cultural opportunities. Iceland is virtually pollution-free and has a friendly population, good cuisine, and modern infrastructure—high-latitude birding for those who like a little more comfort than is usually found within a stone’s throw of the Arctic Circle.

**About the Physical Requirements & Pace:** This tour does not demand much physically. Most of our birding will be done in short walks from our vehicle over predominantly level ground and seldom will we walk more than a mile or two in a day. In those places where some elevation change is involved, our walking will be done at a gentle “birder’s” pace, and participation is optional.

While some of our Icelandic hotels have guest rooms only on the ground floor, others reach several stories — and few have elevators. Therefore, participants should anticipate possibly having to climb one or two flights of stairs to reach their rooms. If you have special needs in this regard, please contact our office so that we can try to arrange the most appropriate rooms for you.

In general, the pace of this tour is fairly relaxed, but the size of the country (similar to Ohio) — and the short duration of the tour — means that we’ll spend a fair bit of time traveling from location to location. We have budgeted time into the route to stop when a good bird or something else catches our eye. There will be several pre-breakfast walk offerings and one or two post-dinner walking opportunities, but in general our birding will start after breakfast and conclude before dinner.
About the Birding Areas

Reykjanes Peninsula and Reykjavik — On the Reykjanes Peninsula, nearer Keflavík, we can watch with spotting scopes for marine mammals, Northern Gannets, and our best chance to see Manx Shearwater and European Storm-Petrel will be here. Northern Fulmars, alcids of multiple species, Black-legged Kittiwakes and several other gull species will be flying by consistently. Expect to be overwhelmed when we immerse ourselves in an Arctic Tern colony numbering in the thousands. Shorebirds such as Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit, European Golden-Plover, Common Snipe, and Dunlin will be roadside attractions. The capital city, perched above the sapphire blue bay called the Faxaflói, can be a great place to bird in summer. Our birding here will concentrate on the lake in the city center known to locals as the “Tjörn,” which can have Whooper Swan, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser, Black-headed Gull, Eurasian Wigeon, and Arctic Tern. A stroll through the city cemetery should get us good looks at Redwing, Eurasian Blackbird, White Wagtail, Common Redpoll, and possibly Goldcrest.

Lake Myvatn — or “Midge Lake” in English, holds one of the world’s largest concentration of breeding ducks, formerly as many as 30,000 breeding pairs, on a lake covering only 37 square kilometers. At 63° 35’ N, the lake is not far south of the Arctic Circle, and its environs hold a mix of low arctic and temperate flora and fauna. On the south and west sides, bogs and moors boast an abundance of alpine and arctic plants, whereas on the north and east sides, birches predominate. In 1974, the Parliament granted nature reserve status to 440,000 hectares around the lake, and this area is closed to entry until mid-summer: species such as Red-throated Loon, Harlequin Duck, Barrow’s Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, and Eurasian Wigeon, all with their young, should be present during our visit. It is not unusual to see a Gyrfalcon overhead here, or a subaesaLón Merlin hunting Meadow Pipits in the moors on either side of the lake. The lake lies just west of the Reykanes Ridge, the meeting place of tectonic plates. The weather here is typically dry, as the lake lies in the rain shadow of the Vatnajökull.

Látrabjarg — At many seabird cliffs, you view (from below) a vast rock face covered with small specks. Látrabjarg is different: from hundreds of meters above the North Atlantic, you can look down on or across to the birds—Atlantic Puffin, Thick-billed and Common murres, Razorbill, Northern Fulmar, and Black-legged Kittiwake, all engaged in nesting activities and easily studied and photographed. Along the shoreline, Glaucous Gulls make passes at Red-necked Phalaropes, and Harlequin Ducks and Common Eider bob in the surfline, near loafting Gray and Harbor seals. Purple Sandpipers may dot the coastline. The local weather, as in much of western Iceland, is usually overcast or foggy or drizzly, in part owing to the effect of the Gulf Stream, which brushes the island’s southwest.

Itinerary for Iceland

Day 1, 27 Jun. or 06 Jul. Departure for Iceland. If you are flying from the US, you will leave today for Iceland, arriving at Keflavík, near Iceland’s capital city of Reykjavík. You arrive either just before midnight or the next morning.

Day 2, 28 Jun. or 07 Jul. Arrival in Iceland, birding the Reykjanes Peninsula. Participants arriving the night before will want to stay at the hotel on the airport grounds. Most people will arrive in the morning bank of flights between 6-8 a.m. After collecting your baggage and clearing customs, you will need to make your way to our meeting point at the Airport Hotel Smari (Aurora Star). It is easy to find since it is the only hotel on the airport grounds. To get to the hotel, exit the airport building at the opposite side from where you emerged from customs. It is just a short walk across the parking lot. There is no shuttle. At the hotel you can dig out your optics and field clothes out of your luggage. Our hotel in Reykjavík will not have our rooms available until the afternoon so we will get directly to the birding. Primary birding sites on the
Day 3, 29 Jun or 08 Jul. Reykjavik birding; flight to Akureyri; transfer to Myvatn. We will walk directly from our hotel for a few hours this morning. Just around the corner is the Tjörn, a pond and adjacent wetland, which attracts Graylag Geese and an assortment of ducks, Black-headed Gulls, Eurasian Oystercatcher, and Common Snipe. A few blocks away is the forested city cemetery, a rare habitat in Iceland. This enchanting graveyard holds Eurasian Blackbirds, Redwings, White Wagtails, and possibly Goldcrest. After checking out of our hotel, we will catch a midday flight from the domestic airstrip in Reykjavik to Akureyri, in the northeast section of the island. Our hotel is about 90 minutes of straight driving to the east of Akureyri. We will wind our way over there with a stop at Godafoss (“Waterfall of the Gods”) en route. Night near Lake Myvatn.

Day 4, 30 Jun. or 09 Jul. Lake Myvatn to Dettifoss. This entire day will be dedicated to birding this waterfowl rich area. Species we will target include: Tufted Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Eurasian Wigeon, Harlequin Duck, Red-throated Loon, and Horned Grebe. The concentration of waterbirds is the principle reason this area is our best chance to catch up to Gyrfalcon. Merlin and Short-eared Owls patrol the region as well. Red-necked Phalaropes are common here and we will look for Eurasian Wren and Meadow Pipit also. We will make stops along the north coast east of Husavik searching for Great Skua. By the afternoon, we will find ourselves marveling at Europe’s most powerful waterfall: Dettifoss. Iceland's volcanic origin is on full display in this region. Night near Lake Myvatn.

Day 5, 01 Jul. or 10 Jul. Myvatn; transfer to Hvammstangi. After trying to clean up any targets we may have missed the day before on Lake Myvatn, we will work our way back to Akureyri, with some birding stops along the way. Our afternoon will be spent tracking west along the Ring Road, while keeping a sharp eye out for Pink-footed Geese and Common Merganser. Night near Hvammstangi.

Day 6, 02 Jul or 11 Jul. West Fjords to Breidavik. The spectacular West Fjords in the northwest corner of the country are remote, rugged, and rarely visited. We will spend our day picking our way along the serpentine southern coast of this dramatic peninsula. Numerous fjords will hold Purple Sandpipers, Whooper Swans, possibly Gyrfalcon or a lingering King Eider, and one of our best chances at White-tailed Eagle. Night in the West Fjords.

Day 7, 03 Jul. or 12 Jul. Latrabjarg seabird cliffs. The seabird cliffs at the westernmost point in Europe are truly a sight to behold. We will spend the morning soaking in the spectacle of hundreds of thousands of alcids in all directions. Atlantic Puffins will be underfoot, Razorbills will be just beyond reach, and Common Murres will crowd ledges like sardines in a can. The cacophony of kitiwakes is stirring, and Northern Fulmars will show off their soaring prowess. Our afternoon may be spent exploring the highlands. Night in the West Fjords.

Day 8, 04 Jul. or 13 Jul. Westfjords to Snaefellsnes Peninsula. We will bird near our hotel then catch the midday Baldur Ferry across Breidafjordur Bay to Stykkisholmur. From the ferry, we will see Atlantic Puffins and Northern Fulmars by the thousands, and remain vigilant for possible Great Skua, Red Phalarope, European Shag, and White-tailed Eagle. Night on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula.
Day 9, 05 Jul. or 14 Jul. The Snæfellsnes Peninsula and Breidafjordur Bay cruise. We will circumnavigate the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, starting along the southern shore and working our way into the National Park at the peninsula’s end. The southern side of the peninsula is dotted with a myriad of small lakes that hold a host of ducks (including the rare Northern Shoveler), loons, and grebes, and Parasitic Jaegers by the score should enliven our route. We will continue on toward Olafsvík and Rif, often good spots for shorebirds and gulls. The whole peninsula is lightly birded, and we might turn up something new for our list out this way, such as an Iceland Gull or a Killer Whale. Our afternoon will be spent taking a bay cruise where we will see nesting European Shags and Black-legged Kittiwakes up close and hope for a White-tailed Eagle. The crew will trawl for the freshest seafood appetizers you can imagine. Night in Stykkishólmur.

Day 10, 06 Jul. or 15 Jul. Return to Reykjavík. Today we will drive back toward the capital, checking a river valley near Borgarnes to look for Iceland’s only nesting Common Shelducks. If time allows, we might return to the coast near the airport for another seawatch. We will be back at the airport no later than 2:30 p.m. Return flights from Keflavík depart in the early evening.

Those wanting to spend another few days in Iceland, taking in the multitude of outstanding restaurants, museums, cultural attractions, and shopping opportunities are encouraged to do so—a week will seem like too brief a stay in this lovely part of the world.

About Your Guides

Godfried Schreur developed his interest in wild birds and nature at an early age and became involved as a volunteer in several Dutch naturalist associations. In 1991, after culminating his Bachelor of Science studies on Nature and Landscape Management at the Van Hall Larenstein Institute (Velp, Netherlands) Godfried came to Extremadura for a period of voluntary practices in the conservation NGO ADENEX. Since 1994, Extremadura became his permanent base. Here he founded, together with Ana Cordero, the company ECOTUREX. He was one of the first specialized birding guides in the region, an activity that he continues to practice with great pleasure.

Godfried is a friendly guide with extensive knowledge and experience. He finds great satisfaction in sharing his knowledge and experiencing the beauty of nature with people. He knows the geography of Extremadura and other interesting areas in Spain very well. He is fluent in Dutch, Spanish, and English. The study of bats is another specialty of his. Godfried has also a deep interest in other fauna, flora and man's role in the landscape, culture and history. In addition, Godfried remains active in environmentalism and is not afraid to protest against projects that seriously threaten sustainable development and nature-conservation.

Financial Information

FEE: $5950 from Reykjavik
DEPOSIT: $600 per person
FINAL PAYMENT DUE: February 27, 2018 (Tour I); March 8, 2018 (Tour II)
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): $1275
LIMIT: 12
Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Sharon Mackie. Sharon will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to call her!

ACCOMMODATIONS: We will stay in comfortable accommodations in all areas throughout the tour.

DOCUMENTS: For US citizens, a passport valid for three months beyond your departure date is required for entry into Iceland. No visa is required.

If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Icelandic consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is $5950 for one person in double occupancy from Reykjavík. It includes all lodging from Day 2 through Day 9, all meals from lunch on Day 2 through lunch on Day 10, the flights within Iceland, all ground transportation, boat trips, entrance fees, tips for baggage handling and meal service, and the guide services of the tour leader(s).

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Iceland, airport taxes, visa fees, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature. If you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The single supplement for the tour is $1275. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the enclosed Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a deposit of $600 per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or by February 27, 2018 (Tour I); March 8, 2018 (Tour II). We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later. Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.
CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less $100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour fees (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute another guide for the original one. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members, and they will have the right to cancel their participation and receive a full refund.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of $50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy online by visiting our website at www.fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.htm and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner’s risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.
THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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