



Field Guides Tour Report

Iceland II 2018

Jul 6, 2018 to Jul 15, 2018

Godfried Schreur

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



The White-tailed Eagle was without any doubt the bird of the trip. Photo by participant Judith Dunn.

We started our Iceland adventure at Keflavik in the Reykjanes Peninsula. From the very first moment that we left the airport, we started birding and enjoying the landscape. Rock Ptarmigan, Red-necked Phalarope, Northern Gannet, Manx Shearwater and European Stormpetrel were amongst the first birds of the trip. On the very last moment, just before saying farewell, we still did some more birding in Keflavik in order not to waste time by arriving too early at the airport. We spotted some Red Knots. And we still enjoyed it!

The White-tailed Eagle was elected as the bird of the trip. The close view of that couple on a tiny island in the Breidafjordur was awesome. The attractive Black-tailed Godwit was a good second best. And the Gyrfalcon was also a thrill to watch, especially when we discovered that we were actually looking at two different Gyrs and not only one, as we assumed in the first place.

The whole Field Guides birding trip in Iceland was delightful from the start to the end. The itinerary, designed with care and proficiency by Eric Hynes, took us to the best places for birding in Iceland like the Latrabjarg seabird cliff, the Myvatn lake, the Breidafjordur and the Gardur cape. Furthermore, we visited some of the best falls and geological features. We covered a rather significant distance in western and northern Iceland in order to see a maximum variety of landscapes, birds and other highlights. The domestic flight and the ferry crossing saved us from driving hundreds of miles extra, and having to back-track. Anyway, traveling through the Icelandic scenery was not a punishment at all. Our bus with plenty of space and a (huge) window seat for everybody, was driven by Olaf, a safe driver and very pleasant person. The hotels were highly comfortable and conveniently situated. Some were absolutely charming. The food was just delicious. Sharon did a great job organizing the logistics of the tour. Everything worked out perfect and smooth. The weather though ... was typical Icelandic, with a bit of everything. Sometimes we felt like we had four seasons in one day.

Last but not least, the company of all the group members was fantastic. Thank you for all your patience and positive vibes!

I love Iceland and I love birding in Iceland! I hope I managed to transmit this feeling to you. And I hope you liked the tour as much as I did.

You were a great group and I am looking forward to seeing you all back again, maybe in Spain or Holland. You are very welcome!

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

- GRAYLAG GOOSE (EUROPEAN)** (*Anser anser anser*) – Graylags are becoming more and more common in Iceland. We saw big concentrations in Blonduos and close to Bargarnes, for example. [N]
- PINK-FOOTED GOOSE** (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) – We achieved very close-by views of a group of adults with goslings at the Héradsvötn-river. [N]
- BRANT (ATLANTIC)** (*Branta bernicla hrota*) – We discovered a lonely bird in the Westfjords. It's unusual to see Brants in Iceland during the breeding season, as they do not reproduce here.
- WHOOPEER SWAN** (*Cygnus cygnus*) – We saw them every day during our tour but we noticed that they are rather shy when you try to take a picture of them... [N]
- COMMON SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna tadorna*) – On the last day we visited an area close to Borgarnes aiming to see the Common Shelduck. We saw over a hundred birds far away. Fortunately some family groups of females with ducklings showed closer by. [N]
- GADWALL** (*Mareca strepera*) – We saw several dozens at the Myvatn lake.
- EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Mareca penelope*) – It was the most numerous group of ducks at the Myvatn lake. We must have seen hundreds all together. The males were starting to moult into eclipse plumage. [N]
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Every day bird. [N]
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN)** (*Anas crecca crecca*) – Small numbers at the Myvatn lake.
- TUFTED DUCK** (*Aythya fuligula*) – We saw lots of females with ducklings, some of them in wild water streams like the Laxa river. [N]
- GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – During our pre-breakfast walk at the Tjörnin lake at Reykjavik we achieved the best views.
- COMMON EIDER (NORTHERN)** (*Somateria mollissima borealis*) – A very obliging female was present at the Tjörnin lake at Reykjavik. We also saw it in all the coastal waters of the areas visited. Despite our continuous scanning of Eider groups, we failed to find a King Eider. [N]
- HARLEQUIN DUCK** (*Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus*) – At the Godafoss we had a good look at a sleepy male. And at the Laxa river we saw a female with a "baby" Harlequin. At Snaefellsness peninsula, from Arnarstappi coast, we saw some more handsome drakes of the Harlequin Duck. [N]
- COMMON SCOTER** (*Melanitta nigra*) – We managed to see several family groups of Common Scoter with lots of ducklings. It feels strange to see them at fresh water environments as we are used to see them in the winter out in the open sea. [N]
- LONG-TAILED DUCK** (*Clangula hyemalis*) – At the Myvatn lake we saw dozens of birds and on the way to the Westfjords we had another good look at these good looking ducks. [N]
- BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – On a pool next to the Myvatn we found a huge concentration of hundreds of drakes. And in a river in the Laxa valley we achieved a closer look at them. [N]
- RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*) – It's a common bird along Iceland's coastline but they never come close.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

- ROCK PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus muta islandorum*) – On the very first day, we achieved a view of this grouse very close to Keflavik airport. That was a relief because it must have been a bad year for this species. We had to wait to almost the end of the tour to see another male perched upon a lava formation close to our Budir hotel.

Gaviidae (Loons)

- RED-THROATED LOON** (*Gavia stellata*) – Very well distributed in Iceland. We saw them almost every day. In Blonduos we had the best views of this attractive bird.
- COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – Another almost every day species. The breeding plumage of this bird is just stunning!

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

- HORNED GREBE** (*Podiceps auritus auritus*) – Fabulous bird in breeding plumage!

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

- NORTHERN FULMAR** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – We saw the Northern Fulmar virtually everywhere, often in big numbers. They breed on all the coastal cliffs that we visited. [N]
- MANX SHEARWATER** (*Puffinus puffinus*) – Good views through the scope on the very first day from Gardur lighthouse.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

- EUROPEAN STORM-PETREL (BRITISH)** (*Hydrobates pelagicus pelagicus*) – We saw these amazing, tiny birds walking on the water surface of the sea at Gardur's coast. Excellent views through the scope.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

- NORTHERN GANNET** (*Morus bassanus*) – Spectacular to see them diving into the sea from substantial heights trying to catch some fish. Some flew rather close by the coastline, although not close enough for good pictures.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

- GREAT CORMORANT (NORTH ATLANTIC)** (*Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*) – We saw the Great Cormorant regularly, sometimes together with the European Shag which enabled us to compare the two familiar species.
- EUROPEAN SHAG** (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) – We saw the Shags mainly at the Breidafjordur coast and islands. Without any doubt, we had the best observation during the Viking Sushi cruise. We came so close that we were able to see their emerald green eyes. [N]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – Fabulous observation of 3 birds, 2 adults and a young on the nest, in the Westfjords. And in the Breidafjörður we saw again 3 birds, of which two were very close by. Thanks to this spectacular encounter on the last day, the White-tailed Eagle was elected as "the Best Bird of the Trip". [N]

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (WESTERN) (*Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus*) – The Oystercatcher is one of the most widespread shorebirds at Iceland's salt water coast. The black and white in combination with the red beak, legs and eye make it an attractive bird to see. [N]

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

EUROPEAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis apricaria altifrons*) – Abundant on heath and grasslands and even in lava fields. [N]

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula*) – Every day bird, but never numerous. [N]

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – One of the most widespread and common birds in inland Iceland. The adult bird with the chick at Arnarstapi were awesome. [N]

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (ISLANDICA) (*Limosa limosa islandica*) – Second best bird of the trip because of his colorful appearance. We fell in love with this attractive wader right from the start of the tour, when we started birding after leaving Keflavik airport. [N]

RED KNOT (*Calidris canutus islandica*) – Looking out of the windows of our fabulous hotel at Budir, we discovered a group of 12 Red Knots resting at the shoreline. Probably, these birds were already back from Greenland after a failed breeding attempt.

DUNLIN (SCHINZII) (*Calidris alpina schinzii*) – Almost every day bird.

PURPLE SANDPIPER (*Calidris maritima*) – We observed Purple Sandpipers on 5 days of the tour. At Olafsvik, on the last whole day of our Iceland adventure, we counted 40 birds all together. He blends in the scenery very well, which makes it easy to overlook them.

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago gallinago gallinago*) – It was a great pleasure to look and listen to his aerial display flights. The drumming sound filled the air at many places. Marvelous!

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Amazing little wader which we were lucky to see frequently. Some birds were starting to moult into their winter plumage, but most of them still proudly showed off with the breeding plumage.

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus robusta*) – Very common wader at the shores and inland grasslands. At the very beginning of the tour, there was a bird that was happy to pose for a photo shoot.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

GREAT SKUA (*Stercorarius skua*) – A very sharp member of our group spotted one at the coastline north of Husavik, where we expected to see it. But unfortunately not everybody got on that bird. Luckily, we had a second chance at Latrabjarg where all of us managed a good view of this chunky bird.

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – On the first day we photographed a color-banded Jaeger close to Keflavik airport. I was informed that the bird was banded this spring very near to where we recorded it. Beautiful bird but a real pain for the gulls and terns. Close to Olafsvik we saw a long persecution of an Arctic Tern by the Jaeger. In the end the tern got away with his fish. Every day bird!

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Outrageous numbers at the Latrabjarg seabird cliff. We managed to see some bridled birds. [N]

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) – Good views of dozens of birds at the Latrabjarg seabird cliff. We were all able to see the white, straight line over the beak. [N]

RAZORBILL (*Alca torda*) – Showed very well at Latrabjarg, offering good photographic opportunities. Latrabjarg houses the biggest colony of Razorbills in the world, offering nesting facilities for 230.000 pairs, which is 40% of the global population. [N]

BLACK GUILLEMOT (GRYLLE GROUP) (*Cepphus grylle islandicus*) – Charming black and white alcid with red feet and red inside of the beak. We enjoyed watching them especially at the coastline south of Holmavik. One bird came close with the catch of the day in the bill. It was a Butterfish, their favorite prey. [N]

ATLANTIC PUFFIN (*Fratercula arctica naumanni*) – Latrabjarg did not let us down. After a long ride, we were rewarded with great views at close range. The memory cards filled up rapidly with pictures of this clown-resembling bird. At the Viking Sushi cruise we, again, enjoyed watching them. They are so cute! [N]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (TRIDACTYLA) (*Rissa tridactyla tridactyla*) – The close by views of breeding Black-legged Kittiwake at the Latrabjarg and during the Viking Sushi cruise, were highly appreciated by us. At Arnarstapi cliffs we were a bit shocked when one chick was thrown out of the nest by an adult bird. A Glaucous Gull benefited rapidly from the situation. [N]

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Every day bird. It is becoming a very common species in Iceland. [N]

MEW GULL (EUROPEAN) (*Larus canus canus*) – We achieved good views of Mew Gulls around Akureyri.

HERRING GULL (EUROPEAN) (*Larus argentatus argenteus*) – Very common at the coastline.

ICELAND GULL (GLAUROIDES) (*Larus glaucoides glaucoides*) – We saw one sleepy bird at a riverbank in Blonduos. Despite the name, the Iceland Gull doesn't breed in Iceland.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (GRAELLSII) (*Larus fuscus graellsii*) – Every day bird.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus leuceteres*) – A huge concentration of them close to Olafsvik provided good photographic opportunities. Hundreds of birds gathered there to eat fish in the waste water of a fish factory.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*) – Breeds on islands in the fjords and on flat areas on top of coastal cliffs. We saw them almost every day in good numbers. [N]

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Walking through an Arctic Tern colony is a risky operation. We were attacked by this elegant bird at Arnarstapi, when we walked on the trail to the cliffs. Iceland houses very numerous colonies of this long distance flyer. [N]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Plenty of Feral Pigeons in Reykjavik.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MERLIN (EURASIAN) (*Falco columbarius subaesalon*) – On day 5 we had 2 flyby's of this small falcon.

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) – Close to Myvatn we saw two Gyrs flying in their breeding territory. We all did see the birds but they stayed far away. The observation of two Gyrfalcons in the Westfjords was much better. One scope was focused on one bird and the other scope to another bird. It took a minute till somebody discovered that we were actually looking at two different birds :-)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax varius*) – Every day bird. Usually in pairs, sometimes in small groups. We had the best observation of this species in the old cemetery of Reykjavik, where a sharp eye discovered a nest with 3 young ravens. [N]

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

EURASIAN WREN (ICELAND) (*Troglodytes troglodytes islandicus*) – We achieved good views in the birch woodland in between the lava formations of Dimmuborgir. Some of us managed to see the Icelandic Wren again in Flokalundur, close to our hotel.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*) – We struggled to see this tiny little Kinglet-type bird. A Goldcrest in the cemetery was not very cooperative. We only saw him flying off. Most of us did see a young bird in the botanical garden of Akureyri. Unfortunately it was so young that he did not have a yellow stripe yet.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (GREENLAND) (*Oenanthe oenanthe leucorhoa*) – We recorded the Northern Wheatear on 5 days of the tour. At Breidavik, close to Latrabjarg, we achieved the best view of this migratory passerine. The white rump and upper tail are a good feature to recognize them in flight. [N]

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula merula*) – We saw Blackbirds in and around Reykjavik. At the city cemetery we were able to watch them at close range.

REDWING (ICELANDIC) (*Turdus iliacus coburni*) – Every day bird. This attractive thrush breeds virtually everywhere in Iceland (except for the highlands of course). His song was the acoustic background music of our tour. [N]

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Yes, they are here as well. For now, only in the west of Iceland.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

WHITE WAGTAIL (WHITE-FACED) (*Motacilla alba alba*) – Every day bird. We saw lots of wagtail families with young, recently flown birds. [N]

MEADOW PIPIT (*Anthus pratensis whistleri*) – Every day bird. Brownish and striped but a pretty little bird anyway.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis insulae*) – A nice male Snow Bunting was discovered when we were searching for Northern Wheatears, close to Latrabjarg. Not a bad by-catch!

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

COMMON REDPOLL (ROSTRATA) (*Acanthis flammea islandica*) – Some managed to see them properly at the Botanical Garden of Akureyri. Around the Flokalundur Hotel it was easier to get a good view of this small finch type bird.

MAMMALS

WHITE-BEAKED DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*) – Two White-beaked Dolphins were discovered during the ferry crossing of the Breidafjordur. The ferry doesn't stop for this, unfortunately. Even so, almost all of us got a glimpse of the cetaceans.

ARCTIC FOX (*Alopex lagopus*) – We discovered an Arctic Fox during the pre breakfast walk through the magical lava-field of Budir. The fox was very brownish and didn't show very long.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – We saw Harbour Seal on two different occasions. Their big eyes and rounded head provide them with a gentle expression.

GRAY SEAL (*Halichoerus grypus*) – Right at the start of our adventure, at the Gardur coast we discovered a Gray Seal. Later in the tour we would see it two times more.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 69 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa