



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Iceland II 2019**

Jun 23, 2019 to Jul 2, 2019

Godfried Schreur

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



*The Atlantic Puffin was the best bird of the trip! (photo by guide Godfried Schreur).*

We love Iceland!

Eric Hynes did a fantastic job setting up the itinerary for the Field Guides Birding tour through Iceland. Our route included the main highlights for birding on this fascinating island. The Myvatn lake' with thousands of ducks like Barrow's Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck and Eurasian Wigeon, also harbors the best population of Gyrfalcons. The Breidafjordur is the place to be for spotting White-tailed Eagles, Glaucous Gulls and European Shags. Nowhere else can you see the Atlantic Puffins so close-by as in Latrabjarg, the majestic cliff with 3 million breeding seabirds at the most western point of Europe. This is a bonus that not many tour companies offer. The itinerary also features the most attractive landscapes of Iceland with wonderful fjords, lava fields, estuaries, volcanoes, icecaps, glacial valleys and rivers and 2 of the best waterfalls, the Godafoss and the Dettifoss. The latter is the most powerful fall of Europe. It is true that there was quite a lot of driving involved in this tour, but driving through Iceland's volcanic and glacial scenery was always fascinating, although we would have liked to stop after every bend for a picture of another beautiful setting. Landscape-wise the Snafellsnes Peninsula was something outstanding with the Kirkjufell (Church Mountain) and the the almost magical Snafellsjokul volcano on the background.

Tour manager Christine Boilard and our ground agent did an excellent job by lining up all the logistics in the right direction. It all worked out perfectly. And I did my best as your guide, aiming to stop at the best sites, spotting the birds, pointing them out to you, focusing the telescope on the most interesting species, giving the opportunity to enjoy the birds and the scenery and get the timing right for a pleasant and comfortable Iceland experience.

Add to this the good hotels, the superb food in fancy restaurants, the comfortable bus and excellent driver, the domestic flight from Reykjavik to Akureyri, we managed to provide all the ingredients for a superb tour, and so it was. The only factor we cannot influence is the weather, but this year we were very fortunate with a lot of sunshine and clear skies.

The Atlantic Puffin was elected the best bird of the trip. Not surprising, since we could almost touch these cute penguin-like birds with their colorful bills. The Harlequin Duck and the King Eider ended as second and third best in the vote. But the White-tailed Eagle and the graceful Arctic Tern were also amongst the highlights of our tour.

We saw (almost) all the important species very well, 73 bird taxa in total. Have a look at the illustrated trip list!

To finish, we saw a lot of good birds, we had wonderful photographic opportunities, we enjoyed the scenery and the Icelandic cuisine. And, not unimportantly, we enjoyed each other's company very much, because we all together made this Iceland trip into a fantastic experience. We all contributed to this tour in our own way, some by sharing interesting information, some with a good sense of humor, some with excellent spotting skills, some by the eBirding and some with entertaining conversations during dinner. I thoroughly enjoyed our Iceland adventure and I therefor want to thank you all.

Looking forward to welcoming you on another awesome Field Guides tour!

Godfried Schreur

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## 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

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## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl).

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Anser caerulescens*) – A vagrant Snow Goose turned up by surprise. He joined a group of Black-legged Kittiwakes close to Latrabjarg.

**GRAYLAG GOOSE (EUROPEAN)** (*Anser anser anser*) – At the very end of the trip, close to the airport, one obliging Graylag Goose came walking towards us, allowing some close-ups. [N]

**PINK-FOOTED GOOSE** (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) – On day 5 we saw at least 100 individuals, mostly goslings. Unlike the Graylag, the Pink-footed Goose is very shy. [N]

**WHOOPEER SWAN** (*Cygnus cygnus*) – Almost every day bird. On the last day we found a family very close to the road which provided us a magnificent view of the woolly cygnets. [N]

**COMMON SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna tadorna*) – Close to Borgarnes, we found 100+ Common Shelducks, mostly ducklings. [N]

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*) – We counted only three birds at the Myvatn lake.

**GADWALL** (*Mareca strepera*) – Common duck at the Myvatn lake.

**EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Mareca penelope*) – On day 4, we estimated a total of 2,000 individuals. Many females were swimming around with ducklings while the drakes gathered in large flocks. [N]

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Every day bird.

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – We saw 5 Northern Pintails in the Laxa valley on day 4.

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN)** (*Anas crecca crecca*) – Seen on 3 days but always in low numbers.

**TUFTED DUCK** (*Aythya fuligula*) – Very numerous at the Myvatn lake. Many females were swimming with ducklings in rivers and lakes. [N]

**GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – We saw the Greater Scaup, frequently although it is less common than the Tufted Duck.

**KING EIDER** (*Somateria spectabilis*) – It was very exciting to see the drake King Eider in between the dozens of moving Common Eiders at the beach of Blonduos.

**COMMON EIDER (NORTHERN)** (*Somateria mollissima borealis*) – At the shore of Blonduos, we enjoyed watching a large group of drake Common Eiders moving on the waves of the sea and diving all together. Amongst them we found a King Eider. [N]

**HARLEQUIN DUCK** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Second best bird of the trip! It is always a treat to see these gorgeous little ducks. On day 9 we saw at least 30 individuals.

**COMMON SCOTER** (*Melanitta nigra*) – At the Myvatn lake we saw males and females.

**LONG-TAILED DUCK** (*Clangula hyemalis*) – The drake really has got a long tail.

**BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – We found a group of at least 30 stunning drakes in the Laxa valley.

**COMMON MERGANSER (EURASIAN)** (*Mergus merganser merganser*) – This is a rare bird in Iceland. We had one brief view of a male close to Akureyri.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*) – Seen almost every day.

### Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies).

**ROCK PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus muta islandorum*) – Close to the Godafoss we encountered a family of Rock Ptarmigans. Eventually, mum and dad sat in the sun, while the chicks explored the area. Awesome! [N]

### Podicipedidae (Grebes).

**HORNED GREBE** (*Podiceps auritus auritus*) – One of the highlights of the tour was the observation of a baby Horned Grebe sitting on mum's back while dad was supplying small fishes. Lovely to see! [N]

### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – We saw Feral Pigeons in Reykjavik.

### Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers).

**EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (WESTERN)** (*Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus*) – Every day bird. We saw many pairs with baby oystercatchers. [N]

### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

**EUROPEAN GOLDEN-PLOVER** (*Pluvialis apricaria altifrons*) – The European Golden Plover was the first bird that we stopped for shortly after leaving the international airport. We had a good look at this attractive wader. At that point, we didn't know yet that we would see this species every day. [N]

**COMMON RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula*) – The Common Ringed Plover looks very much like the Semipalmated Plover, but lacks the webs between the toes and the eye ring and has got a longer, thinner bill. [N]

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – We heard and saw the European Whimbrel every day of the trip. Close to the Godafoss, a very obliging individual provided close views. [N]

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (ISLANDICA)** (*Limosa limosa islandica*) – We saw this good looking wader almost every day. I remember a particularly good view of the Black-tailed Godwit in the Westfjords close to Holmavik (photo). [N]

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*) – On the first excursion day we saw a Sanderling in winter plumage at the beach of Gardur.

**DUNLIN (SCHINZII)** (*Calidris alpina schinzii*) – Very distinctive in breeding season with his black belly and ginger upperparts.

**PURPLE SANDPIPER** (*Calidris maritima*) – We saw a group of Purple Sandpipers at the shore, below the marvelous basalt rock formations in Arnarstapi. Sometimes they are hard to find because of their camouflage plumage.

**COMMON SNIPE** (*Gallinago gallinago gallinago*) – This long-billed wader produces "the sound of Iceland" with his outer tail feathers while doing his display flight. [N]

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – We enormously enjoyed seeing this fascinating species every day of the tour. They are always busy, day and night, no time to lose in their short breeding season. [N]

**COMMON REDSHANK** (*Tringa totanus robusta*) – Another every day bird. The Common Redshank is hard to overlook. He often comes close to defend his breeding territory, while making a lot of noise. [N]

*Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)*

**GREAT SKUA** (*Stercorarius skua*) – We had only one view of Great Skua above Husavik. This specie is more common on the eastern and southern side of Iceland.

**PARASITIC JAEGER** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – We saw the Parasitic Jaeger every day. The pale morph birds are very pretty, although the terns and small gulls have another opinion about them.

*Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)*

**COMMON MURRE** (*Uria aalge*) – Thousands of auks breed on the cliffs of Latrabjarg, with the Common Murre being the most numerous. They like to sit in groups on the narrow ledges. [N]

**THICK-BILLED MURRE** (*Uria lomvia*) – Very easy to distinguish thanks to the white line along the side of the bill. [N]

**RAZORBILL** (*Alca torda*) – We had good views of Razorbill at the Latrabjarg cliffs which harbors the largest colony in the world. [N]

**BLACK GUILLEMOT (GRYLLE GROUP)** (*Cepphus grylle islandicus*) – At the southeastern side of the Westfjords we managed close views of this pretty little auk species. [N]

**ATLANTIC PUFFIN** (*Fratercula arctica naumanni*) – The Atlantic Puffin was elected "The Bird of the Trip"! Not surprising when looking at our pictures. [N]

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (TRIDACTYLA)** (*Rissa tridactyla tridactyla*) – Pretty but rather noisy gull. It is easy to understand why they were named "kittiwake" when listening to their call at the breeding colonies. [N]

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – Every day bird, but always nice to see, though. [N]

**MEW GULL (EUROPEAN)** (*Larus canus canus*) – This is the european (nominat) subspecies of the Common Gull, which is uncommon on Iceland. We saw it mainly around Akureyri.

**HERRING GULL (EUROPEAN)** (*Larus argentatus argenteus*) – In almost all the groups of gulls there are some Herring Gulls mixed in.

**ICELAND GULL (GLAUCOIDES)** (*Larus glaucoides glaucoides*) – Despite its name, the Iceland Gull is very rare in Iceland during the breeding season. We saw 5 Iceland Gulls in Blonduos and 1 in Olafsvik. The observation in Blonduos was special because we saw all of Iceland's gull species together on one small island in the river.

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

**GLAUCOUS GULL** (*Larus hyperboreus leucetetes*) – This great and clean looking gull is common on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula but uncommon in the rest of Iceland. The concentration of gulls next to Olafsvik provided great views of this species allowing some practicing with the different age groups.

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus marinus*) – This massive gull breeds on top of small grassy islands where we saw some chicks. During the breeding season, he feeds on eggs and chicks of other gulls and seabirds. [N]

**ARCTIC TERN** (*Sterna paradisaea*) – This elegant long distance migrant attacks when you approach its breeding colony. While birding in Iceland it's almost impossible to avoid these attacks, as there are Arctic Tern colonies at many places, even close to houses and in the heart of villages. Wearing a hat is a good defense! :- ) [N]

*Gaviidae (Loons)*

**RED-THROATED LOON** (*Gavia stellata*) – We struggled to achieve good views but on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula we managed to see them very well, even with chicks. [N]

**COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – We saw this great diver almost every day and we heard its wonderful call on several occasions. [N]

*Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)*

**NORTHERN FULMAR** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – This miniature albatross is very common on Iceland, breeding on virtually every cliff, even further inland. We enjoyed watching them every day of the tour. [N]

**MANX SHEARWATER** (*Puffinus puffinus*) – Most of us managed reasonably good views of this seabird on the first day from the Gardur lighthouse.

*Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)*

**NORTHERN GANNET** (*Morus bassanus*) – The long, narrow and white wings with black tips, and long head and tail make the ID of this biggish seabird easy. Good views from Gardur lighthouse.

*Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)*



**GREAT CORMORANT (NORTH ATLANTIC)** (*Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*) – It was nice to see the Great Cormorant and the European Shag together in order to see the size difference.

**EUROPEAN SHAG** (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) – The European Shag was seen mainly in the Breidafjordur. [N]

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*

**WHITE-TAILED EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – We saw 2 occupied nests. One with two chicks and one with only one. At the first nest site, we waited for an adult to appear. And so he did. We saw one adult bird approaching in flight from far away with a prey. Once in the nest he started to feed the young. [N]

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**SHORT-EARED OWL (NORTHERN)** (*Asio flammeus flammeus*) – There are less than 200 pairs breeding on Iceland. So, it can be difficult to find the Short-eared Owl. Usually the owl finds you.

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**MERLIN (EURASIAN)** (*Falco columbarius subaeson*) – Great views of a female Merlin with chicks close to the Godafoss. [N]

**GYRFALCON** (*Falco rusticolus*) – We saw Gyrfalcons on 5 days of the tour. Not bad for this huge but shy and rare falcon! [N]

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax varius*) – Seen almost every day.

*Troglodytidae (Wrens)*

**EURASIAN WREN (ICELAND)** (*Troglodytes troglodytes islandicus*) – We were very close to several singing Eurasian Wrens but they stayed in the cover of the vegetation. [\*]

*Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)*

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR (GREENLAND)** (*Oenanthe oenanthe leucorhoa*) – Common on slopes with stones, especially in the Westfjords. [N]

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**REDWING (ICELANDIC)** (*Turdus iliacus coburni*) – One of the most common and widespread birds on Iceland. They are present virtually everywhere. [N]

**EURASIAN BLACKBIRD** (*Turdus merula merula*) – We enjoyed good views of the Eurasian Blackbird, the one that sings "in the dead of night", at the old cemetery of Reykjavik.

*Sturnidae (Starlings)*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Present in several towns and cities.

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)*

**WHITE WAGTAIL (WHITE-FACED)** (*Motacilla alba alba*) – Every day bird. We saw lots of juveniles as well. [N]

**MEADOW PIPIT** (*Anthus pratensis whistleri*) – Another nice every day bird. The songflight of this little passerine is great! [N]

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)*

**BRAMBLING** (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – We discovered a singing male Brambling in a forest close to Akureyri. Since then, a lot of birders have had the pleasure to see the bird.

**COMMON REDPOLL (ROSTRATA/ISLANDICA)** (*Acanthis flammea islandica*) – We saw Common Redpolls on several occasions. On the last day we managed the best views of males, with even some red on the breast.

*Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)*

**SNOW BUNTING** (*Plectrophenax nivalis insulae*) – We saw the Snow Bunting almost every day, but we had the best views around our hotel next to the Myvatn lake. [N]

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## MAMMALS

**WHITE-BEAKED DOLPHIN** (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*) – Some of us had a far away view of several White-beaked Dolphins jumping out of the water.

**ARCTIC FOX** (*Alopex lagopus*) – The Arctic Fox is heavily persecuted in Iceland and therefore becoming very rare and shy. We were lucky to see one Arctic Fox along the N° 1 road, not far away from Laugarbakki.

**HARBOR SEAL** (*Phoca vitulina*) – Seen on two occasions.

**GRAY SEAL** (*Halichoerus grypus*) – We saw at least 14 Gray Seals lying in the sun below the Latrabjarg cliffs.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 73 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa**