

Trip Report — Iceland 2025

June 15-24, 2025 with Cory Gregory



This view at Breidavik captures many aspects that make Iceland such a beautiful place to visit. Between the cliffs, wildflowers, and interesting architecture, Iceland really is a unique and special place. Photo by participant Bill Compton.

The island-country of Iceland, jutting out of the north Atlantic, is truly one of a kind. It's home to some of the world's most breathtaking views and also home to millions of nesting seabirds. Between the rich history, volcanic landscape, breathtaking seaside cliffs, mountaintop glaciers, and expansive marshes, Iceland really does stand alone. Lucky for us, this awe-inspiring destination was our home, at least for a little while.

Our trip together began in Keflavik once we all arrived (some of us only barely) but it was refreshing to finally get outdoors and to start our birding after all that flying. We started right there in Keflavik and visited a lighthouse right on the water which was a good place to learn some of the common shoreline species that we'd be seeing a lot of. We had our first Common Eiders (making some goofy sounds!), various handsome shorebirds like Eurasian Oystercatcher, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Ringed Plover, and a nice mix of gulls like kittiwakes, Black-headed Gull, European Herring Gull, and of course the huge Great Black-backed Gulls. A little flock of Manx Shearwaters wheeled around offshore, a few gannets kept an aerial vantage whilst looking down for prey, and even some European Shags flew by. Some nearby marshy ponds were alive with breeding Arctic Terns, Common Redshank, Whimbrel, Meadow Pipit, and White Wagtail but it was the Common Snipe winnowing overhead that was especially memorable! After lunch in a local restaurant (remember the neck ties?), we started towards Reykjavik. Our nice hotel was perfectly situated in a bustling part of the city alive with shops, cafes, parks, and statues. Dinner at a restaurant nearby was memorable indeed, the food was amazing!



Iceland is home to more Razorbills than any other country. In fact, about 70% of the total population nest on a handful of cliffs in Iceland! We had stunning views of this handsome alcid at Latrabjarg. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

That next morning, we took a pre-breakfast stroll to a nearby pond in Reykjavik where we looked out, through the rain, and picked out Graylag Goose, Whooper Swan, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, and some Red-breasted Mergansers. And then a short walk through a local cemetery put us around our first Redwings and Eurasian Blackbirds, both thrushes but without thrush in the name. After breakfast and packing up, we walked to a nearby bus station where our driver picked us up and took us to the airport for our domestic flight to Akureyri. Once airborne, those lucky to have window seats had an interesting look down on the Icelandic landscape as we flew to the northeast. Our picnic lunch spot near Akureyri delivered several target species; Eurasian Wrens were in full song, a Goldcrest flitted overhead, and even some very rare breeding Fieldfares made us work for views. But after a bit, it was time to head towards our hotel on the banks of Lake Myvatn. Our faces were plastered to the bus windows, watching incredible landscapes unfold in front of us.

A new day dawned and we got underway by heading to a little local patch of forest where we had several views of the water which of course meant new birds for our checklist. We added a "Eurasian" Green-winged Teal, Barrow's Goldeneye, and of course the normal selection of Common Snipe, White Wagtail, Redwing, Meadow Pipit, and even some Redpolls. After our stroll, and only a short way down the road, we took another walk at Dimmuborgir. The volcanic landscape towered above us and there may have even been some sightings of the Yule Lads near their summering caves. At this point we left Lake Myvatn for a daytrip up to the north, to the coast where we enjoyed a couple of impressive spectacles. First and foremost, we stopped at an Atlantic Puffin colony where we watched the antics of these oceanic clowns as they checked out their burrows. We took a stroll along the cliff, getting fantastic views of Northern Fulmars as they shot by at arms-reach, got to see some Harlequin Ducks down below on the water, and even saw a couple of Great Skuas as they patrolled the offshore waters. A nearby pond had been hosting a rare visitor, a Common Pochard, and so we stopped and added that rarity to our list. We closed out the afternoon with a visit to a majestic waterfall, Dettifoss, which is one of the most-powerful waterfalls in all of Europe.



It's not just seabirds. Iceland is home to many species of nesting shorebirds too. One of the most common is the Common Redshank, a handsome *Tringa* that is not found in North America. Photo by participant Jeanette Shores.

The north shore of Lake Myvatn had an impressive density of waterbirds and because of that, it was our first destination that next morning. We scoped Pink-footed Geese, several families of Whooper Swans, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Loon, Long-tailed Duck, and some Common Scoters. After our exploration, we needed to pack up and depart Lake Myvatn but once on the road, we made a detour to Lake Vestmannsvatn and had a quick look at the long-staying Arctic Loon before it went out of view. Honestly, the Short-eared Owl flying over the lake with prey was probably more interesting! Next was a stop at another impressive waterfall, Goðafoss, or "Falls of the Gods". Indeed, they were very impressive! Afterwards, we headed into Akureyri to gather some lunch and ate it at a nearby botanical garden. After a lovely stroll post-lunch, we gathered up again and drove west to our next hotel. The landscape really opened up ahead of us and it seemed like Whimbrel, Parasitic Jaeger, Whooper Swans, and European Golden-Plovers were around every corner.

Arising the next morning, we gathered outside Hotel Laugarbakki to see what was about. The answer, right off the bat, was an incredible experience with Rock Ptarmigan! Not only did we see it well, it rocketed by us a couple of times before it eventually decided to sit atop the roof where it stayed and posed. Looking down into the river valley, we enjoyed more views of Parasitic Jaeger, Whimbrel, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Snipe, and of course Redwing and Meadow Pipit. After packing up, we made our way west into a gorgeous corner of the country, the famous Westfjords. We kept our eye out for White-tailed Eagle, Rock Ptarmigan, and various ocean-loving species like Black Guillemot. As we were getting ready to stop for lunch, Sabrina spotted what would be our one-and-only Gyr Falcon of the trip! Well spotted! Just down the road from there, we enjoyed our picnic lunch while watching an active White-tailed Eagle nest! In the afternoon we carefully and slowly worked our way through the Westfjords all the way to Breidavik. That evening visit to the Latrabjarg cliffs was our first experience with how impressive the nesting seabirds are in Iceland. Our eyes were wide open, trying to take in the thousands upon thousands of nesting murres, Razorbills, and Puffins. We went to bed happy with our camera storage cards full.



The countless lakes in Iceland make it a perfect place for nesting loons. The most common one we saw, like this stunner, was the Red-throated Loon. Photo by participant Bill Compton.

We took an exploratory and relaxed walk around Breidavik that next morning with a chance to bird the grounds and to see what was visiting the nearby wetland. The highlight by far was a Gray Heron that was chilling in the back of the pond! This European species belongs a lot of places but Iceland isn't one of them. After breakfast, we ventured back to the Latrabjarg cliffs for a more extensive and relaxed visit. We sat among the puffins, were within arms reach of Razorbills, and the fulmars cruised by at eye level. The Black-legged Kittiwakes were pattering their feet on their new nests, White Wagtails gleaned insects from the cliffs, and the ocean below was teeming with thousands of alcids, eiders, and Harlequin Ducks. It was hard to pull ourselves away from the magic but we eventually did that and stopped a short way down the road. Our mission here was to explore the kelp line on the beach. Verdict? It was loaded with shorebirds like Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, Red-necked Phalarope, Common Redshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Purple Sandpiper, and our one and

only Red Knot. Farther up the hillside, we spent time with a couple of pairs of Northern Wheaters as they bounded from rock to rock. We returned to Breidavik for some lunch, which almost turned into supper, before we said our goodbyes and headed east. We paused at the old shipwreck, which was a good vantage point for Purple Sandpipers, before we continued to our next hotel at Flokalundur. It was another beautiful evening in Iceland.



Iceland is indeed a harsh place but you might be surprised to know that, yes, there are forests. They may not be the tallest forests but it still was a welcome respite from the chilly wind. Photo by participant Suzanne Schroeder.

The wind was howling. That's what we first noticed when we woke up the next morning and looked outside. But we didn't let that stop us, we ventured out for a pre-breakfast walk and managed to enjoy beautiful scope views of a singing Redwing, noticed a White Wagtail atop our bus, enjoyed several Redpolls as they flew around, and looked down offshore where there were Harlequin Ducks, Long-tailed Duck, and a normal assortment of shorebirds. After breakfast and loading up, we retraced our steps a bit to enjoy a beautiful flock of 30-40 Harlequin Ducks, paid another visit to our nesting White-tailed Eagle friends, but mostly it was us trying to get out of that brisk wind. Midday we loaded up on the ferry and took the 2-3 hour trip

across the bay which ended up saving us hours upon hours of driving. Plus, it gave us another chance to enjoy all these Icelandic seabirds we had been seeing. Black Guillemots swam and dove next to the boat, Atlantic Puffins fluttered out of the way, and a variety of gulls lined the shoreline. The ferry, which stopped briefly in Flatey, was also a good vantage point to watch for more White-tailed Eagles. It wasn't long until Sabrina did it again, she spotted a pair of White-tailed Eagles atop a distant spire! We landed in Stykkisholmur, loaded back up on the bus, and headed to one of the most recognizable mountains and waterfalls in all of Iceland, Kirkjufellsfoss. We took a walk to get a good vantage of the waterfall, the mountain, and the gorgeous scenery. Meanwhile, in the stream, a Parasitic Jaeger took a freshwater bath. We eventually made our way from here down to Buðir, our beautiful home for the next two nights. The estuary spanning out in front of us, a picturesque church on the open landscape, and Rock Ptarmigans right around the hotel made for a beautiful setting indeed.



One of the only tubenoses, as they're called for the tubular nostrils on their bill, that nests in Iceland is the Northern Fulmar. Incredibly, between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000 fulmars are thought to use Iceland for breeding. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

We had a full, leisurely day to explore the Snaefellsness Peninsula and we started out with a pre-breakfast walk around the grounds at Buðir. Common Snipe continued to winnow overhead, families of Common Redshank littered the boulders along the estuary, and the ubiquitous Meadow Pipits fed chicks hiding nearby. After breakfast we drove east to check Ytritunga Beach, hoping for a King Eider. Although we didn't find any, it was a pleasant walk filled with sightings of Common Eiders, a great diversity of shorebirds including close Dunlin, offshore shags, and even an American Mink! After we loaded up, we drove to the north side of the peninsula and stopped at a beach where we scoped gulls. It was pretty blustery but we were successful in finding an Iceland Gull which sure seemed fitting considering where we were. We then visited the town of Rif where we birded along one of the bays, finally finding a King Eider thanks to a tip from another group! We visited a few other spots in Rif, including having lunch, before continuing down and around to Arnarstapi. We took a stroll out to the coast, checked out the offshore rock formations, snapped some photos of some close Whimbrel before loading up and heading back to our comfortable hotel.

We met up again before breakfast the next day and took one last stroll around Buðir. Considering it was our final day of the trip, we paid special attention to our last Rock Ptarmigan of the trip, one that flew by calling much to our delight. We took a few more looks at the estuary, and appreciated the many oystercatchers, golden-plovers, kittiwakes, and Northern Fulmars that were nesting up on distant mountainsides. After we loaded up, we started working our way east once more. We stopped at some roadside ponds and scoped 100-200 wigeons (including a couple of Americans) before continuing south to the town of Borganes. We birded up the south side of the tidal estuary where we found a few Common Shelducks. A few hundred, actually! After we finished our views of these handsome ducks, we scoped a nest of a White-tailed Eagle before we loaded up and continued down towards Reykjavik. We stopped at a pond where we successfully relocated a rare Ring-necked Duck although sorting through nearly 100 Tufted Ducks took a bit. We had time for another quick stop and so we paused at a forest where there had been a Common Chiffchaff and I'm happy to say that we were successful in finding this stray songster. Ending the trip with a nice

vagrant like that was a solid way to wrap things up. We grabbed lunch and then it was back to the airport in Keflavik.



Perhaps the most well-known breeding bird in Iceland is the Atlantic Puffin. More Atlantic Puffins nest in Iceland than any other country with estimates up to 10 million! Photo by participant Jeanette Shores.

Some other critters we encountered:

White-beaked Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*) - We were able to confirm these with photos.

Common Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

Arctic Fox (*Vulpes lagopus*) - In the end I think we all saw these guys.

American Mink (*Neogale vison*) - It was pretty neat seeing this although they're invasive and not native.

Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Gray Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)



Kirkjufell is a well-known and recognizable mountain located along the western coast of Iceland. You might even recognize it from movies and shows like Game of Thrones. The nearby waterfall, seen here, is aptly named Kirkjufellsfoss. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Iceland is such a mythical and magnificent country and I'm happy I was able to explore some of it with you all. From the many lakes, volcanos, estuaries, mountains, cliffs, and beaches, we saw some of what makes Iceland such a once-in-a-lifetime destination. We shared many stories, many miles, and countless birds together and all of it is thanks to you for joining Field Guides on this adventure. We hope you made lasting memories and will look back fondly on your time in Iceland. Until we meet again on another adventure, be safe, and good birding!

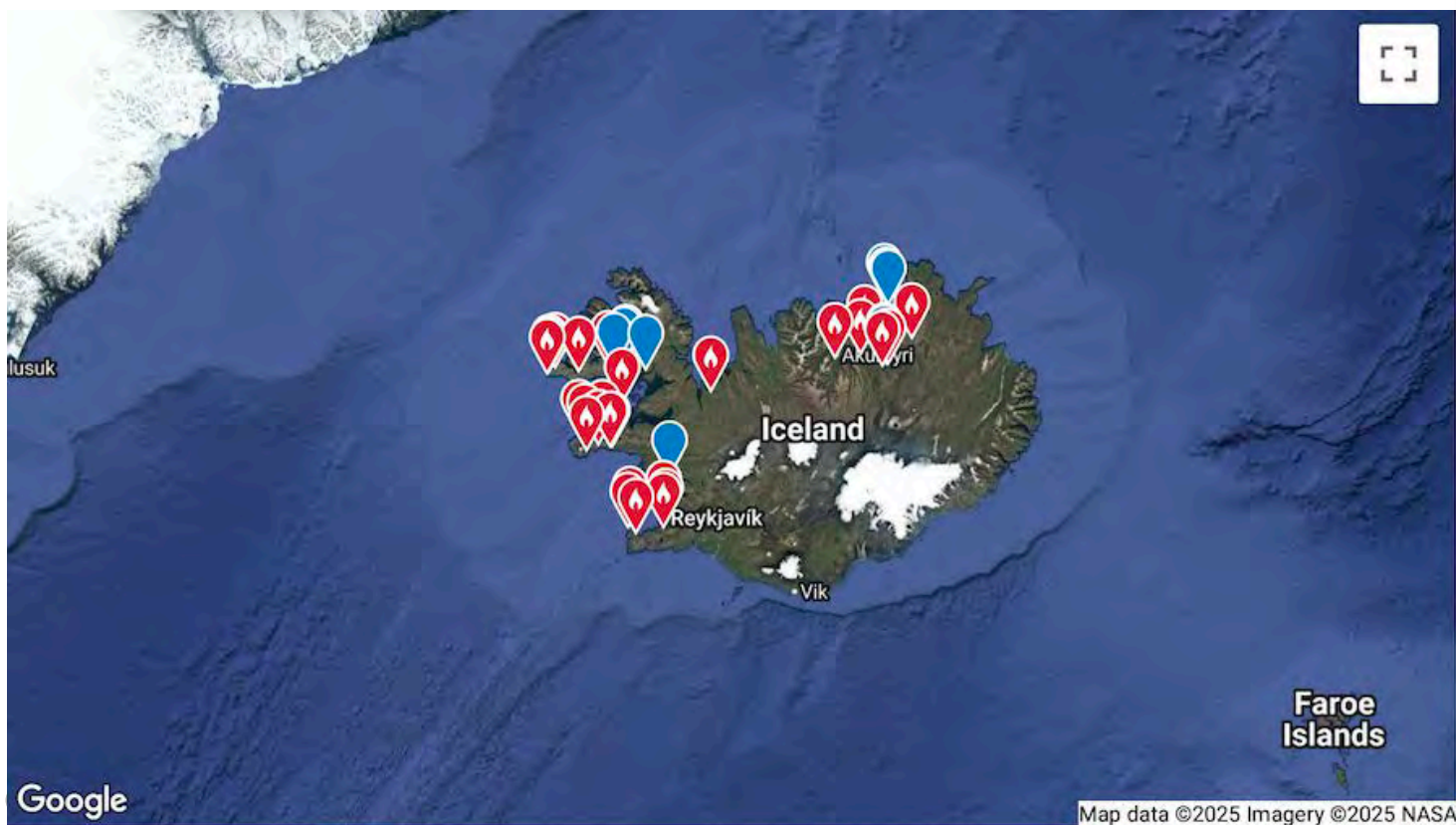
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/395027>

-- Cory Gregory (Curlew)

Field Guides Birding Tours -- ICELAND, 2025 (with Cory Gregory)



16 – 24 Jun 2025 (9 days) Link-only



Iceland

Höfuðborgarsvæði | Norðurland eystra | Norðurland vestra | Suðurnes | Vestfirðir | Vesturland

 Cory Gregory



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional...

 79

Species Observed

 45











Checklists























 3





















Species with Photos






















Species Observed










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342	Graylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	▶  11
8	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	▶  3
141	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	▶  12
321	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	▶  2
4	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	▶  1
131	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	▶  2
2	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	▶  1
77	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  22
2	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	▶  1
8	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  4




1	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	▶  1
1	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	▶  1
322	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	▶  11
28	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	▶  3
1	King Eider	<i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	▶  1
496	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	▶  18
52	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	▶  4
9	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	▶  3
32	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	▶  5
3	Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>	▶  2
45	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	▶  15
8	Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>	▶  2  4
7	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	▶  2
1	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	▶  2  1
91	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	▶  23
41	European Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	▶  19
30	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	▶  10
30	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	▶  17
34	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	▶  14
95	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	▶  26

95	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	▶  13
340	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	▶  23
1	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	▶  1
1	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	▶  1
1	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	▶  1
42	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶  8
20	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>	▶  3
23	Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	▶  14
2	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	▶  1
4166	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	▶  6
20	Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	▶  5
101	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	▶  3
550	Thick-billed Murre	<i>Uria lomvia</i>	▶  2
6013	Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	▶  3
1158	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	▶  8
110	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	▶  16
1	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	▶  1
3	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	▶  3
128	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	▶  16
116	Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	▶  15

99	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	▶  10
1	Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucoides</i>	▶  1
381	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	▶  22
15	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	▶  4
24	Red-throated Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	▶  10
1	Arctic Loon	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	▶  1
11	Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	▶  6
1080	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	▶  17
12	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	▶  1
21	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	▶  3
8	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	▶  6
32	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	▶  6
1	Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	▶  1
10	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	▶  5
1	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	▶  1
1	Gyrfalcon	<i>Falco rusticolus</i> Sensitive	▶  1
17	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  10
1	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	▶  1  1
1	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	▶  1
7	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	▶  4

- 15 **European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* ▶  1
- 74 **Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* ▶  20
- 7 **Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula* ▶  2
- 3 **Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* Sensitive ▶  1
- 4 **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* ▶  2
- 46 **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* ▶  23
- 84 **Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* ▶  29
- 20 **Redpoll** *Acanthis flammea* ▶  6
- 5 **Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* ▶  3

ADDITIONAL TAXA

- 1540 **Thick-billed/Common Murre** *Uria lomvia/aalge* ▶  3
- 1 **Larus sp.** *Larus sp.* ▶  1
- 2 **loon sp.** *Gavia sp.* ▶  1