

Trip Report — Iceland 2026

June 14-23, 2026 with Cory Gregory



Although there are many reasons to visit Iceland, seeing puffins seems to be atop many people's wish lists. And for good reason! These brightly colored Alcids are some of the most recognizable birds on the planet. Of course, we spent quality time with Atlantic Puffins including at the cliffs at Latrabjarg where it's possible to get absolutely crippling views and photos. We all were amazed at how fortunate we were! Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Jutting out of the North Atlantic is the island nation of Iceland, lava fields rudely rising from a rough ocean, about 200 miles southeast of Greenland. Remote, rugged, a bitter swirling wind, and with an always active geothermal scene. But there is more to Iceland. Once there and you can immerse yourself in the landscape, culture, and wildlife, you'll see there is a multitude of reasons to visit! There is a wealth of wildlife, especially birds, nesting in the wet meadows, along the shorelines, and the epic seabird cliffs. The scenery is top-tier, you'll find amazing vistas around every

turn. Don't forget the breathtaking waterfalls too! And although the weather can be chilly and windy, we found ourselves in meadows surrounded by singing pipits and wagtails. It became very obvious to us that Iceland is way more than what meets the eye!

We convened in Keflavik and started our trip aboard a large, comfortable bus. No cramming into a van! Nearby, we got our first taste of the Icelandic avifauna when we visited the Garður Lighthouse. We were met by dozens of Common Eiders, lots of gulls, terns, a few Common Loons, and even some distant Manx Shearwaters. A European Shag sat out on the rocks with Great Cormorants, White Wagtails walked up and down the rocky shore, and a plethora of shorebirds fed in the washed-up kelp. Eurasian Oystercatchers, European Golden-Plovers, Common Ringed Plovers, Eurasian Whimbrel, Common Redshank, Ruddy Turnstone, and Dunlin were seen, all at our first stop. We visited some nearby freshwater ponds and enjoyed seeing Common Redshank well, saw our first Common Snipe winnowing overhead, and scoped some gulls including Black-headed, European Herring, Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed, and an Iceland. After lunch, we visited a different shoreline south of town and enjoyed more looks at many of the same things including dozens of Graylag Geese, some with chicks, and some new fancy Black-tailed Godwits. But before long, we made our way into Reykjavik to our nice hotel on a town square. After our dinner at a nice restaurant, it was back to the hotel to try to combat our jetlag and to get some sleep.



The seabird cliffs in Iceland are absolutely teeming with nesting birds of all sorts. One of the more prolific and vocal ones is the Black-legged Kittiwake. We had ample chances to watch these small gulls as they tended to eggs in their narrow cliffside nests. Photo by participant Deborah Hart.

The next morning we started out with a short walk to the nearby pond where we scoped Eurasian Wigeon, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser, and a variety of gulls. We then made a brief visit to the nearby cemetery where we enjoyed seeing our first Redpolls and getting to listen to Eurasian Blackbirds and Redwings as they sang in the "forest". After checking out of our hotel, we made our way to the Reykjavik Domestic Airport where we caught a flight up to Akureyri. The perks of doing this were many! It saved us an incredible amount of backtracking across the entire country, but it also gave us a new experience; seeing Iceland by air, flying over the ice fields and glaciers as we came down through a gorgeous

mountain valley to land. Very cool! It was here that we first met our driver, Keli. We loaded up in another comfortable bus and off we went. We had the special treat of getting to see some Fieldfares at a secret spot, but also visiting a nearby park that hosted our first Goldcrest and Eurasian Wren! From here we visited a very famous waterfall, Goðafoss. It was especially nice to have the commentary from Keli regarding the history. From here, we made our way back to the west a little bit and settled into our comfortable hotel on the shores of Lake Myvatn.



You never quite know where you'll find Rock Ptarmigan in Iceland but you most-likely will! We had many encounters throughout our trip but this was our first one, a beautiful bird in the trail at the Höfði Forest. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Today started with us birding around Lake Myvatn where we encountered lots of new species for our triplist. Pairs of Barrow's Goldeneyes kept careful eyes on us, a pair of Common Scoters swam off in the distance, and a lovely Common Loon in breeding plumage swam close to shore. We took a stroll around the Höfði forest and enjoyed the many winnowing Common Snipe overhead, Redwings feeding chicks, a couple of perched Redpolls, and even a

lovely Rock Ptarmigan in the pathway. Our next stop was the peculiar lava field at Dimmuborgir but our search for the Yule Lads was cut short by rain. After we finished birding around Lake Myvatn, we ventured north and stopped at a different lake, one hosting a very rare Arctic Loon! Still, the real attraction for the day, for many, was the stop we made after lunch for puffins! Atlantic Puffins were seen beautifully as they stood guard over their holes, dozens of Northern Fulmars were riding the gusting wind, and a Great Skua zoomed by right overhead! Success! Afterwards, we ventured to another very famous waterfall, Dettifoss, where we walked out and got to see (and feel!) Europe's most powerful waterfall. All in all, it was a great day!



This trip will be especially memorable for all the White-tailed Eagles we found. I think I lost the exact count but I think it was 12-15! This particular encounter was especially nice when this eagle did some low circles overhead! Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

The following day it was time to check out of our hotel, sadly, and leave Myvatn behind us. Keli had a chunk of driving to do but the rest of us watched the landscape go by, amazing vista after amazing vista. We

stopped in Akureyri and visited the botanical gardens where we took a stroll around some big trees for a change. Later that day, as we drove west, we were able to find many Pink-footed Geese and Common Gulls along the river which were nice additions to our triplist. Farther down the road, we birded in Blönduós along the river for a bit, scoping the many Black-legged Kittiwakes bathing in the river and a collection of Parasitic Jaegers as they ripped through the gull flocks out by the rivermouth. As we made our way into the Westfjords, it didn't take long before we spotted our first White-tailed Eagle! We poured out of the bus in time to see it soaring lazily overhead, sometimes chased by a "tiny" Great Black-backed Gull. Stupendous sighting! Around the corner, we found another eagle. And, thankfully, that would be the theme for our time in the Westfjords, lots and lots of eagles! We settled into our hotel and enjoyed a warm meal in their restaurant as the wind ripped outside.



In some ways, it's the shorebirds that really rule Iceland. We enjoyed an incredible diversity of shorebirds including dozens, if not hundreds, of Eurasian Oystercatchers. Here's a great shot of one taken by participant Scott Stoner.

Another day greeted us, this time with less wind which allowed a morning walk to a beautiful waterfall right behind the hotel. Common Redshanks, Common Snipes, Black-tailed Godwits, Eurasian Whimbrels... all of these were nesting in the wet meadows nearby. After we packed up and departed, and as we wound our way around the Westfjords, the scenery was just stunning. We passed by hundreds of eiders, gulls, terns, and even some seals as Keli drove us around the fjords, one after the other. At one point we even spotted a drake King Eider right next to shore! We piled out and enjoyed absolutely crippling views of this handsome Arctic species. Wow. We eventually made it to our hotel and got settled in. I have to say, it was amazing being able to stay so close to the cliffs at Látrabjarg. In fact, we made our first visit to the cliffs that night; Razorbills, puffins, murres, and hundreds of kittiwakes. What a sight! After some time there, we went back to our comfortable rooms and got some sleep with dreams of Razorbills.

The next morning, we took a stroll behind our hotel and got to see close nesting Red-throated Loons which were stunning in the morning light. Arctic Terns chattered above us, snipe were busy doing their thing, and the yard had half a dozen European Golden-Plovers and Common Ringed Plovers that were probably nesting nearby. Pretty neat stuff to have literally right outside our rooms. After breakfast, it was time to go back to the seabird cliffs at Látrabjarg! This time we had even more time to enjoy the sensory overload of all these nesting birds a mere arm's length away. Atlantic Puffins too close to focus on, Razorbills snoozing mere feet away, and the narrow ledges filled with nesting kittiwakes and murres. What a special, special place. Nearby, we had some quality views of Northern Wheatear and some incredibly tame Snow Buntings that really wanted to pose for the cameras. After lunch, and as we made our way back to the east through the Westfjords, we stopped here and there, seeing many of our now-familiar avian friends. At one spot, by the big metal ship, we carefully picked out a couple of Purple Sandpipers foraging in the kelp along with the usual hoard of oystercatchers, golden-plovers, ringed plovers, phalaropes, and redshanks.



One doesn't have to look far in Iceland to see a stunning view or an amazing vista. Here's a typical view from a random stretch of road we traveled in the Westfjords in the northwest corner of Iceland. The many fjords that we wound around kept the views always interesting. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

A few of us gathered early the next morning to take a look around our hotel. There wasn't anything mind-blowing but it was still a nice morning, filled with the songs of Redwings and wagtails. A few Harlequin Ducks swam offshore and a couple more Purple Sandpipers were also spotted. After breakfast and checking out, we started our drive down and around to our next hotel. Along the way, hardly surprising anymore, was another White-tailed Eagle (this one on a nest). Nearby we found 30-40 Harlequin Ducks which was quite a sight, and then another couple eagles! We took the chance to visit a famous spot that afternoon, Kirkjufellsfoss, which literally translates to "church hill waterfall". We could see why it was so popular, the view was impressive. That afternoon we wound our way down to our hotel, way out in the country, on the edge of an estuary, with snow-capped mountains and waterfalls rimming the views to the north... what an incredible place to call home for two nights.

The following day we had all day to explore the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. We started just by our hotel where we saw an American Mink, an introduced menace (but still adorable). We loaded up and birded first to the east a little bit where we stopped along several ponds and lakes. Families of Whooper Swans were seen close to the road, jaegers swooped over the open country, and we even found a group of Northern Shovelers nearby. We visited a nearby beach, Ytritunga, which is famous for viewing seals, and we did indeed see lots of seals! But we also had more amazing looks at a couple species of shorebirds including point-blank Eurasian Oystercatchers which lots of folks photographed. On our way back to the bus, we found some nesting Arctic Terns tucked away in the grass. Our next stop was just up the road, at Bjarnarfoss. Besides the scenic waterfall (which was lovely), there was a family of Eurasian Wrens feeding youngsters and a few nearby Goldcrests were seen too. From here we made our way to the north side of the peninsula to the town of Ólafsvík. We stopped to check out some gulls and had short ID session where we studied the differences between Glaucous Gulls and the smaller Iceland Gulls. There were some European Shags out on the rocks, a pair of Harlequin Ducks swimming close to shore, and even a Merlin zipped by. After lunch we visited a couple different beaches to make sure there weren't any Brant swimming around. We ended up at Arnarstapi where we took a stroll out to the shoreline to check out the crazy rock formations and to see what birds were around. We found the usual suspects including Northern Fulmars nesting, some fluffy young Great Black-backed Gulls, and the omnipresent Common Eiders. We called it a day at this point and retreated to our lovely hotel, Budir.



We passed countless small ponds, wetlands, and lakes. A staple on all of these were the tiny, water-loving Red-necked Phalaropes that were often seen swimming along the edges. What a peculiar and gorgeous little shorebird. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

This next day was our final day, sadly. We left our beautiful hotel and hit the road, stopping at a few mudflats on the way. The Common Shelducks were distant but there were indeed a lot of them. We got back to Keflavik with just enough time to visit the Garður Lighthouse once more. This, our final birding stop of the trip, was a good chance to take some last looks at Northern Gannets streaming by, swarms of kittiwakes roosting out on the rocks, and even a couple of Manx Shearwaters again. The biggest surprise here were two new trip birds; we found a Sanderling and Red Knot, both on the beach with the normal collection of plovers, oystercatchers, redshanks, and turnstones. What a nice way to cap the trip!

I want to sincerely thank all of you for coming and for making this trip possible. I hope you enjoyed Iceland and the many aspects that make it special; not just the birds but the scenery, history, and geology as well. From epic waterfalls, to flying over glaciers, to steaming geothermal vents, to

other-worldly lava fields... we really did see a lot! It was an absolute pleasure having Keli along behind the wheel. Good, safe driving but also a lot of bonus information!

I hope see you again on another Field Guides trip. Until then, be safe and good birding!



There isn't a huge diversity of land mammals in Iceland, especially native ones. However, there are some introduced species that we encountered like this American Mink. These were introduced from Norway for the fur trade but some escaped and thrived, feasting on all the birds, eggs, and other wildlife. But, one thing is for certain, they're still mighty cute. Photo by participant Denise Hackert-Stoner.

Some other critters we encountered:

Arctic Fox (*Vulpes lagopus*) - The only native land mammal! We saw these

near Breidavik.

American Mink (*Neogale vison*) - Adorable but not native.

Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) - Many seen offshore and on rocks.

Gray Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) - Seen mostly around the Garður lighthouse.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this
link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/539832>

-- Cory Gregory (Curlew)

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 Cory Gregory



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

 75

Species Observed

 49

Checklists

 26

Species with Photos

LIFERS  1 

Species Observed

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156	Graylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	▶  8
7	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	▶  1
29	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	▶  7
275	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	▶  1
4	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	▶  1
53	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	▶  3
164	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	▶  7
1	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	▶  1
49	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  17

2	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  1
129	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	▶  8
22	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	▶  5
1	King Eider	<i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	▶  3  1
664	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	▶  17
44	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	▶  4
6	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	▶  3
19	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	▶  5
12	Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>	▶  1  2
1	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	▶  1
42	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	▶  16
2	Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>	▶  1  1
8	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i> *	▶  1
44	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	▶  2  12
13	European Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	▶  1  9
30	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	▶  1  11
19	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	▶  10
17	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	▶  1  7
37	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	▶  3  13
24	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	▶  1  9

130	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	▶  1  19
7	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	▶  2
1	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	▶  1
1	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	▶  1
22	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶  1  5
6	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>	▶  3
14	Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	▶  8
1	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i> 	▶  1  1
2585	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	▶  6  3
9	Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	▶  5
85	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	▶  3
85	Thick-billed Murre	<i>Uria lomvia</i>	▶  2
365	Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	▶  3
495	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	▶  1  10
346	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	▶  1  19
10	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	▶  1
9	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	▶  2
50	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	▶  1  11
82	Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	▶  8
93	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	▶  9

2	Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucoides</i>	▶  2
306	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	▶  3  24
5	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	▶  1  2
13	Red-throated Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	▶  3  8
1	Arctic Loon	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	▶  2  1
15	Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	▶  11
443	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	▶  7  15
14	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	▶  2
66	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	▶  1  2
22	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	▶  5
20	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	▶  5
7	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	▶  7  6
1	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	▶  1
1	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	▶  1
7	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  7
8	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	▶  4
11	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	▶  1  4
11	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	▶  4
64	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	▶  18
13	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	▶  3

2 **Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* Sensitive ▶  1

5 **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* ▶  4

33 **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* ▶  19

29 **Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* ▶  2  16

16 **Redpoll** *Acanthis flammea* ▶  7

2 **Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* ▶  2  1

HYBRIDS

3 European Herring x Glaucous Gull (hybrid) *Larus argentatus x hyperboreus* ▶  2

ADDITIONAL TAXA

824 Thick-billed/Common Murre *Uria lomvia/aalge* ▶  4