

BIRDING TRIP REPORT

ICELAND

26 May – 31 May 2005

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Introduction

Although the number of species on a trip to Iceland is quite low, the amazing scenery and quality of birding more than makes up for this. We found accommodation easily enough although it goes without saying that Iceland is painfully expensive. Expect to pay around £6 for a pint and around £10 for the cheapest meal/snack. We had no problems seeing Brunnich's Guillemot, Harlequin or Barrow's Goldeneye but we missed both Gyr Falcon and White-tailed Eagle. Grey Phalarope is limited to a few pairs these days and we were too early anyway for this species.

Flights were booked through www.icelandexpress.com (c£200 return from Stansted) and car hire through Hertz (around £365 for a Toyota Avensis for 5 days).

Sites

During our short five day trip we concentrated on birding the Snaefellsnes Peninsula and Lake Myvatn areas, deciding against a visit to the North West Peninsula area due to time constraints.

Daily Itinerary

Thursday 26 May

Arrived Reykjavik 14.35 local time and after picking up our hire car we headed straight to the Snaefellsnes Peninsula via Borgarnes (where we stopped to eat), Vegamot and Olafsvik, with plenty of roadside stops on the way. Night spent at the Hotel Hellissandur (c£35 each) just outside Olafsvik. Apart from several stops to check through large groups of waders, we managed to find 3 Harlequins on a roadside stream as we dropped down into Olafsvik and this was followed by a further 5 birds sat on rocks near to our Hotel. AB & JPH also managed to spot several White-beaked Dolphins just offshore.

Species seen: Red-throated Diver (3), Slavonian Grebe (4), Fulmar (500+), Gannet (5), Shag (6), Whooper Swan (350+), Greylag Goose (6), Barnacle Goose (2), Brent Goose (pale-bellied 40+), Wigeon (2), Teal (1), Mallard (20), Shoveler (6), Tufted Duck (40), Scaup (10), Eider, Harlequin (8, 6 males & 2 females), Red-breasted Merganser (9), Goosander (2), Ptarmigan (1), Oystercatcher (15), Ringed Plover (12), Golden Plover (20+), Knot (2000+), Sanderling (40+), Purple Sandpiper (8), Black-tailed Godwit (4), Dunlin (100+), Snipe (20+), Whimbrel (3), Redshank (30+), Turnstone (20+), Red-necked Phalarope (8), Arctic Skua (9), Black-headed Gull (20+), Lesser Black-backed Gull (100), Herring Gull (4), Greater Black-backed Gull (20), Glaucous Gull (75), Iceland Gull (2), Kittiwake (100+), Arctic Tern, Razorbill (10), Puffin (5), Rock Dove (2), Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail (5), Wheatear (2), Redwing (20+), Raven (20), Starling

Friday 27 May

Left hotel and headed along Peninsula to Malarriif Lighthouse, where we undertook

a short seawatch that produced several Brunnich's Guillemots. We then spent some time at the nearby seabird cliffs and obtained further excellent views of Brunnich's Guillemot on both the cliff ledges and sat on the sea. We subsequently returned to Olafsvik via the huge Arctic Tern colony at Rik. The site of over 800 Glaucous Gulls in Olafsvik harbour was unexpected !!! The remainder of the day was taken up with the 6+ hour drive to Akureyri where we spent the night.

Species seen: Red-throated Diver (2), Fulmar, Gannet (4), Cormorant (3), Shag (2), Whooper Swan (150+), Pink-footed Goose (6), Greylag Goose (20), Brent Goose (pale-bellied 250+), Wigeon (4), Teal (4), Mallard (20), Tufted Duck (25+), Scaup (5), Eider, Harlequin (7), Red-breasted Merganser (20), Ptarmigan (3), Oystercatcher (50), Ringed Plover (10+), Golden Plover (100+), Purple Sandpiper (2), Sanderling (8), Dunlin (6), Snipe (50), Black-tailed Godwit (7), Whimbrel (10), Redshank (40+), Turnstone (10), Red-necked Phalarope (17), Arctic Skua (7), Black-headed Gull (30+), Common Gull (4), Lesser Black-backed Gull (50+), Herring Gull (4), Greater Black-backed Gull (1000+), Glaucous Gull (800+), Kittiwake (1000+), Arctic Tern, Guillemot (200), Brunnich's Guillemot (20), Razorbill (50), Black Guillemot (1), Puffin (10), Rock Dove (1), Meadow Pipit (50+), White Wagtail (6), Wheatear (12), Redwing (12), Raven (20), Starling (5)

Saturday 28 May

We drove to Husavik to check out the possibility of a Whale watching trip and ending up booking onto a 3 hour trip in the afternoon (c£30). On the way we managed to find our first Barrow's Goldeneye several Kms before the town along with summer plumaged Great Northern Diver. A short seawatch north of Husavik produced large numbers of Puffins and a Grey Seal. The boat trip itself also produced huge numbers of Puffins and although we didn't see the hoped for Minke Whales (we were a little bit early for the larger whales) we did manage to see 6 Harbour Porpoise. After our boat trip, we headed straight to Lake Myvatn where we had excellent views of both Harlequin and Barrow's Goldeneye on the Laxa River. Night spent at Hotel Reynilid, Reykjahilo at the northern end of the lake, where we got dragged out of the bar at 10pm to see a drake American Wigeon that had been found across the road by another group of birders !

Species seen: Great Northern Diver (2), Fulmar, Gannet (4), Whooper Swan (20+ including pair with young), Pink-footed Goose (2), Greylag Goose (50+), American Wigeon (1 male), Wigeon (40), Gadwall (4), Teal (3), Mallard (10), Tufted Duck (60+), Scaup (10), Eider (very common), Harlequin (25), Long-tailed Duck (5), Common Scoter (11), Barrow's Goldeneye (8), Red-breasted Merganser (20), Common Pochard (1), Ptarmigan (2), Oystercatcher (10+), Ringed Plover (20), Golden Plover (very common), Knot (50+), Sanderling (8), Purple Sandpiper (9), Dunlin (30), Snipe (40+), Black-tailed Godwit (6), Whimbrel (12), Redshank (25+), Turnstone (3), Red-necked Phalarope (8), Arctic Skua (8), Great Skua (10), Black-headed Gull (20), Common Gull (10), Lesser Black-backed Gull (4), Herring Gull (5), Iceland Gull (2), Glaucous Gull (3), Greater Black-backed Gull (10), Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Guillemot (1), Razorbill (1), Black Guillemot (8), Puffin (5000+), Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail (10), Wheatear (5), Redwing (100+), Raven (2)

Sunday 29 May

Most of the day was spent at various sites around Lake Myvatn, although we did head north to Husavik to look for a Ross's Gull that had been present yesterday (when we drove past it !). Several visits to the Laxa River again produced Harlequin and Barrow's Goldeneye but we were unsuccessful with Gyr Falcon all day. Another night spent at Hotel Reynilid, Reykjahilo.

Species seen: Red-throated Diver (1), Great Northern Diver (3), Slavonian Grebe (30+), Fulmar, Gannet (1), Whooper Swan (25), Pink-footed Goose (10), Greylag Goose (common), Wigeon (100+), Gadwall (10+), Teal (4), Mallard (20), Pintail (3), Tufted Duck (500+), Scaup (50+), Hybrid Ayatha (1), Eider (60+), Harlequin (10), Long-tailed Duck (10), Common Scoter (20), Barrow's Goldeneye (9), Red-breasted Merganser (20), Merlin (1), Ptarmigan (20+), Ringed Plover (7), Golden Plover (very common), Knot (60), Sanderling (15), Purple Sandpiper (1), Dunlin (3), Snipe (common), Black-tailed Godwit (7), Whimbrel (15), Redshank (60), Red-necked Phalarope (50), Arctic Skua (4), Great Skua (1), Black-headed Gull (30), Herring Gull (1), Iceland Gull (1), Glaucous Gull (3), Greater Black-backed Gull (10), Kittiwake (numerous Husavik), Arctic Tern, Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail (10), Wren (1), Wheatear (2), Redwing, Raven (2), Common Redpoll (3), Snow Bunting (7)

Monday 30 May

We eventually left Lake Myvatn for the long drive to Reykjavik late morning but not before we had scaled the impressive ash crater at Hverfjall and paid a final visit to the River Laxa. Again no Gyr Falcons, although everyone we bumped into seemed to be seeing them, but not us ! Night spent at Hotel Klopp in centre of Reykjavik.

Species seen: Red-throated Diver (1), Slavonian Grebe (10), Fulmar, Cormorant (2), Whooper Swan (100+), Pink-footed Goose (3), Greylag Goose (50+), Wigeon (60+), Teal (10+), Mallard (8), Tufted Duck (40+), Scaup (2), Eider (70+), Harlequin (7), Barrow's Goldeneye (8), Red-breasted Merganser (15), Goosander (1), Ptarmigan (6), Oystercatcher (2), Ringed Plover (2), Golden Plover (common), Knot (1), Sanderling (2), Black-tailed Godwit (2), Whimbrel (6), Redshank (25), Red-necked Phalarope (50+), Arctic Skua (2), Black-headed Gull (20), Common Gull (3), Lesser-black Backed Gull (5+), Herring Gull (1), Glaucous Gull (1), Greater Black-backed Gull (5), Kittiwake (25), Arctic Tern (numerous), Short-eared Owl (1), Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail (2), Wheatear (1), Redwing (35+), Raven (10), Starling (6), Snow Bunting (1)

Tuesday 31 May

Our final day was spent in the area near to Keflavik Airport, with the first stop of the day a visit to Gardur to look for the long staying American Black Duck. Despite extensive searching of the pools behind the High School we were unable to locate it and eventually we moved onto the nearby lighthouse at Gardsskagi where we undertook a short seawatch. This added the final species of the trip, Manx Shearwater and after a quick (but expensive !) lunch at a KFC in Keflavik, we caught our return flight to London Stansted at 15.50, arriving back in the UK at around 8pm.

Species seen: Great Northern Diver (2), Fulmar, Manx Shearwater (2), Gannet (4), Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Sanderling (35), Purple Sandpiper (3), Dunlin, Snipe, Whimbrel (3), Redshank, Turnstone (50+), Arctic Skua, Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull, Iceland Gull (1), Glaucous Gull (2), Great-black Backed Gull, Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Guillemot (10), Razorbill (4), Puffin (7), Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail, Redwing, Starling, Raven

SYSTEMATIC LIST

In total we saw 72 species. The list below follows the sequence, nomenclature and taxonomy of the '*British Birds' List of the Birds of the Western Palearctic*.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Common, with 350+ on 26/5 the largest number seen in one day.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

2 at Hellissandur and 4 en route Olafsvik to Akureyri on 27/5; 2 at Husavik and 4 at Myvatn on 28/5; 10 at Myvatn on 29/5; and 3+ en route on 30/5.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Seen daily in small numbers, with 50+ the largest number noted in one day on 30/5.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

2 en route to Olafsvik on 26/5.

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

40+ between Reykjavik and Olafsvik on 26/5 and several skeins totalling 250+ birds migrating north-west along the coast at Malarrif on 27/5. All were of the pale-bellied form *B.b.hrota*.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Common at Myvatn, with small numbers seen elsewhere.

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

A splendid male in the company of female Eurasian Wigeon at Myvatn on 28/5.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

3 at Husavik on 28/5 and 10+ at Myvatn on 29/5.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Small numbers seen, up to 10 in a day.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Seen daily and fairly common.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

3 males at Myvatn on 29/5.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

2 (male and female) en route to Olafsvik on 26/5.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Common, with 500+ at Myvatn on 29/5, including a male Pochard x Tufted Duck ('Lesser Scaup' type) hybrid.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Small numbers seen, with 50 at Myvatn on 29/5 the largest count in one day.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

A single male at Husavik on 28/5.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*

Very common, often seen in flocks numbering hundreds on the coast. Several females seen with newly hatched broods.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

3 (2 males, 1 female) en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 5 (2 ad males, 2 imm males, 1 fem.) at Hellissandur and 2 males en route to Akureyri on 27/5; 20 at Husavik and en route to Myvatn on 28/5; 10 at Myvatn on 29/5; 6 (3 males, 3 fems) at

Myvatn and 2 fems en route to Reykjavik on 30/5. Undoubtedly the bird of the trip, superb views were had on the Laxa River at the southern end of Myvatn.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

3 (2 males, 1 fem) near Husavik on 28/5; 10 at Myvatn and 2 at Husavik on 29/5.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

6 at Husavik and 5 at Myvatn on 28/5; 20 at Myvatn on 29/5.

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*

2 males at Husavik and 5 (3 males, 2 fems) at Myvatn on 28/5; 9 (5 males, 4 fems) at Myvatn on 29/5 and 8 (6 males, 2 fems) there on 30/5. As with Harlequin Duck good views were had of this species on the Laxa River, Myvatn.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Seen daily and fairly common along the coast and at Myvatn.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

2 (male and female) en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 1 male en route to Reykjavik on 30/5.

Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*

1 male en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 2 males at Malarrif on 27/5; 2 at Husavik on 28/5 and 5 there on 29/5; 6 en route to Reykjavik on 30/5.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

5, Reykjavik to Olafsvik on 26/5; 1 at Hellissandur and 1 en route Olafsvik to Akureyri on 27/5; 1 at Myvatn on 29/5; 1 en route to Reykjavik on 30/5.

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

1 at Akureyri and 1 at Myvatn on 28/5; 2 at Myvatn and 2 (a breeding pair) at Husavik on 29/5; 2 at Gardur on 31/5.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

4 en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; at Myvatn 6 on 28/5, 30 on 29/5 and 10 on 30/5.

Fulmar *Fulmaris glacialis*

Very numerous, with thousands seen on the Snaefellsnes peninsula on 27/5.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

2 at Gardsskagi on 31/5.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

1 at Hellissandur on 26/5 and 27/5; 3 at Husavik on 28/5 and 4 at Gardsskagi on 31/5.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

3 at Hellissandur on 27/5 and 2 en route to Reykjavik on 30/5.

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

2 en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 1 at Hellissandur and 1 at Malarrif on 27/5.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

1 at Myvatn on 29/5.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Fairly numerous, with 50+ seen on 27/5, the largest count in one day.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Small numbers seen daily, with 20 at Husavik on 28/5 the largest count.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

One of the commonest breeding waders, with 250+ seen at Myvatn on 29/5.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

2000+ in one flock and almost all in breeding plumage on roadside north of Reykjavik on 26/5; 1 at Olafsvik on 27/5; 56 at Husavik on 28/5 and 60 there on 29/5; 1 en route to Reykjavik on 30/5.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

100+ with Red Knot north of Reykjavik on 26/5; 8 at Olafsvik on 27/5; 8 at Husavik on 28/5 and 15 there on 29/5; 2 en route to Reykjavik on 30/5; 35 at Gardsskagi on 31/5.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

8 at Hellissandur on 26/5; 1 at Hellissandur and 1 at Olafsvik on 27/5; 9 at Akureyri on 28/5; 3 at Gardsskagi on 31/5.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

100+ seen along coast en route to Olafsvik on 26/5, but thereafter only small numbers, max 10 seen other days.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Very common, with drumming males an almost ever present feature. The largest total in a day was 150+ at Husavik and Myvatn on 29/5.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

3 en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 4 between Olafsvik and Akureyri on 27/5; 6 at various roadside sites on 28/5; 7 at Myvatn on 29/5; 2 en route to Reykjavik on 30/5.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

2 en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 3 at Akureyri on 27/5; 10+ at various sites on 28/5; 15 at Myvatn on 29/5 and 6 there on 30/5; 3 at Gardur on 31/5.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Seen daily and common.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

20+ en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 1 at Hellissandur and 3 at Olafsvik on 27/5; 2 at Husavik on 28/5; 50+ at Gardsskagi on 31/5.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

7 en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 14 at Olafsvik on 27/5; 2 at Akureyri, 4 at Husavik and 1 from the 'pelagic' off Husavik on 28/5; 50 in total at Myvatn and Husavik on 29/5; 50+ at Myvatn on 30/5.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Seen daily in small numbers often harrying Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes, with 9 on 26/5 the max count in one day.

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*

3 at Husavik and 5 from the Husavik bay whale watching 'pelagic' on 28/5.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Seen daily and fairly common.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

3 adults at Akureyri on 27/5 and 10 there on 28/5; 3 en route to Reykjavik on 30/5.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Common on the Reykjanes Peninsula, and small numbers at Hellissandur and Olafsvik. Apart from 2 at Akureyri on 28/5 none were seen on the north coast of the island or at Myvatn. All were of the race *L.f.graellsii*.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Seen daily but surprisingly not at all numerous, with max count of 5 in a day, though may have been overlooked amongst Glaucous Gull flocks.

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*

2 at Hellissandur on 26/5; 2 on 28/5 and 1 there on 29/5, and 1 at Gardur on 31/5. All were first-summer birds.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyerboreus*

50+ en route to Olafsvik on 26/5; 4 at Hellissandur, 800+ around a fish factory at Olafsvik and 20+ at Akureyri on 27/5; 1 at Akureyri and 2 at Husavik on 28/5; 2 at Husavik on 29/5; 1 adult near Reykjavik on 30/5; 1 at Gardur and 1 at Gardsskagi on 31/5.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Common, with 1000+ noted gathered at a fish factory at Olafsvik on 27/5.

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Very common, with thousands seen along the coast of the Snaefellsnes peninsula on 27/5 alone.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

The ubiquitous seabird of the trip, with countless thousands seen. Most birds had not long arrived and were in the process of pair formation and nest site selection so were not as hostile to our intrusions as might have been expected.

Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*

200+ at Malarrif on 27/5 and 10 at Gardsskagi on 31/5, though lots of auks in flight distantly offshore at the latter site were either this or the next species.

Brunnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*

15+ near the lighthouse at Malarrif on 27/5, included birds on ledges at very close range and several sat more distantly offshore.

Razorbill *Alca torda*

10 at Hellissandur on 26/5; 50+ at Malarrif on 27/5; 4 at Gardsskagi on 31/5.

Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*

1 at Malarrif on 27/5 and 1 from the whale watching vessel 'Nattfari' off Husavik on 28/5.

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*

5 at Hellissandur on 26/5; 6 at Malarrif on 27/5; 5000+ from the whale watching vessel 'Nattfari' as it approached 'Puffin Island' in Husavik bay on 28/5, and 7 at Gardsskagi on 31/5.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

1 feral bird was seen at Olafsvik on 27/5.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

1 at Myvatn on 30/5.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

The only common and widespread passerine seen, along with Redwing.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Small numbers, no more than 10 in a day, were noted during the trip. All were *M.a.alba*.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

1 at Myvatn on 29/5.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Noted in small numbers, max 6, on most days of the trip.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Along with Meadow Pipit the commonest passerine, seen daily and surprisingly often found in barren habitat though also numerous around human habitation.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

Seen daily – the only Corvid of the trip.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Small numbers seen on several days.

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

2 at Myvatn on 29/5 were of the race *C.f.islandica*.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

7 Myvatn on 29/5 and 1 Myvatn on 30/5.

Mammals

White-beaked Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*

Several off Hellissandur on 26/5.

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

6 Husavik during whale watching trip on 28/5.

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*

1 north of Husavik on 28/5.

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