

# Svalbard – Isfjorden

## 4<sup>th</sup> June – 6<sup>th</sup> August 2018



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## ABOUT MY STAY IN SVALBARD ...

I spent two months in Svalbard during the summer 2018 as a field assistant for the Norwegian Polar Institut. This work was a part of my PhD thesis and consisted in monitoring of different seabird colonies in Isfjorden. We followed mostly 4 colonies : the Kittiwake colony of Grumantbyen, the Little Auk colony of Bjorndalen, the Brunnich's Guillemot colony of Diabasodden and the Puffin colony in Gåsøyane. In addition, counts were realized in different parts of the fjord (Pyramiden, Noisedalen, Alkhornet, Kapp Linné...) allowing me to see other places of the fjord.

I do not think any birdwatchers have for project to go there to spend two months in Longyearbyen. And most birdwatching trips consist to cruise around the archipelago of Spitzberg... In that case, it's quite easy to see the Arctic targets, especially the Ivory Gull and the Polar Bear. But an "easy" trip obviously has a cost that some birdwatchers cannot easily afford. The aim of the present report is to show that a lot of species can be easily seen around Longyearbyen during the summer months. In my case, I didn't spend so much time to do birdwatching due to the fieldwork occupying most of my days... and at the end, I didn't see so many species, but it's difficult to be bored of seeing Red Phalaropes around you, and Arctic Skuas in the city. It is also very pleasant to look for local rarities. I think that this trip-report and the trip-report of Jukka Intikka (from 2006 ; <https://www.cloudbirders.com> ) are good examples that it's possible to see a good diversity of species only by birding around Longyearbyen.

Mid-June seems to be the best period to spend a week in Longyearbyen, most of the breeding species are coming back and still around (not breeding far in the tundra). Migratory birds are regularly seen and nice surprises can be find (Gulls, Ducks, Waders...; see Gallery in <http://www.svalbardbirds.com>)



Pale-bellied Brant Geese (*Branta bernicla hrota*) in Adventfjorden in June

## WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS AROUND LONGYEARBYEN

During my birdwatching session, I went, depending of the weather, either in the direction of Bjorndalen (Airport, Camping place) either in the direction of Adventdalen and the mine 7 still in activity (the choice was quite easy, there is only one road). I also tried to go every time in the bird observatory situated behind the snow scooter rental (78.223556, 15.667501) to have a look in Adventfjorden. I had the chance to have a car which is a significant help at least to prospect the long valley of Adventdalen. There is the possibility to rent a bike in town but of course, you need to be armed to go out of the limits of the city (due to the potential encounter with a Polar Bear). It's naturally unpleasant to always carry a rifle on the field but it's enough to hear some stories to be aware of the risk...

During windy days, I favored the direction of the camping place (78.249905, 15.490840) which is a good place for ducks, waders and especially for gathering of gulls. I have seen in this place : Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Black-headed Gull, GBBG... I often did some seawatching sessions from the lighthouse

few hundreds meters away (78.251864, 15.416130) ; the sea is always crowded of birds in the Arctic (alcids, fulmars, kittiwakes...) but when the wind is picking up the fulmars only pass a few meter from the coast and you have good chance to see some skuas and gulls (Iceland Gull, LBBG, Pomarine Skua among the most interesting) going along the coast into the flux of birds.

In the other direction, I stopped every time around the dog kennel (78.218945, 15.696819) crowded of Common Eiders in June (to avoid the predation of the fox). The place is interesting for waders, gulls and passerines (White Wagtail this year and some previous records of Redwing, Blackbird...). Then I prospected meticulously along the road (78.210319, 15.773072; with the fresh water pond of Isdammen on my right) the tundra meadow habitat where Arctic Terns breed, and where King Eiders and waders are often seen (Turnstone and Sanderling were noted, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Phalaropes were common). The beginning of Isdammen (78.202932, 15.788634) is always interesting with some ducks and always several hundreds of geese, this part of the lake become dry in summer and become attractive for waders... On Isdammen, Long-tailed Ducks were very often seen with Red-Throated Loon and a lot of Eiders (Tufted Duck, Pintail and King Eiders are often noted). Farther, until the rise of the mine, ponds along the principal and adjacent roads are good places for waders, the two species of Phalaropes are easy to see around, some nests of Red-throated Loon are also visible, King Eiders are quite easy to see in June and the Ivory Gull was around the last dog kennels.

## INFORMATIONS

I simply present here a commented list of my sightings. I added the status of the species (taken from <http://www.svalbardbirds.com> ) to give you an idea of the chance or not that I had. The good birding places are always changing along the seasons, the years and according to water levels. If you want more details about some places or informations in general, don't hesitate to contact me : [paul.dufour80@gmail.com](mailto:paul.dufour80@gmail.com) or to contact the ornithological group of Longyearbyen.

During my stay, I regularly checked the Artobservasjoner website (<https://www.artsobservasjoner.no> ) to be advised of the last sightings around Longyearbyen (especially for the Ivory). I missed some species : a Redshank in Adventfjorden in the end of June, some Northern Wheatears in June, a Meadow Pipit in Adventdalen in July and the hardest : a Sabine's Gull close to Isdammen in July with a perfect breeding plumage... Also a facebook group is useful for marine mammals sightings: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/966626870120103/?ref=bookmarks> I warmly thank the person who announced the Humpack Whale in the harbor of Longyearbyen:

Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*) sitting on the roof of the dog kennel of Longyearbyen





## BIRDS

### 1- Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*) : Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)

A common species in the Longyearbyen area. A pair was staying in the Adventfjorden, at least 2 nests along the road in Adventdalen and between 4-6 birds frequently in Isdammen or flying around. The nest closest to the road failed but the one on Londammen gave 2 chicks. Also a pair seen in the bay of Colesbukta in 26<sup>th</sup> June and at least 2 pairs around Gåsøyane in July.

### 1'- Diver sp. – Plongeon sp. (*Gavia* sp.)

Two birds seen from Alkhornet on 12<sup>th</sup> June flying in the middle of the Isfjorden could have been Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*) but too far to be sure...

### 2- Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)

Seen daily at sea or high in the sky from Longyearbyen with birds coming from the valley. The gradient of colour of this species is very broad in Svalbard, it's quite rare to see birds as white as birds breeding in Western Europe but the very dark blue plumage is more common. Some windy days, hundreds of birds were seen in Adventfjorden or flying very close along the coast until Bjorndalen. The species is even more common in the north of the Isfjorden close to the big colony of Noisedalen in Templefjord.

### 3- Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) : Occasional (relatively frequent occasional visitor)

1 3cy bird seen on 7<sup>th</sup> July flying into a flux of fulmars from the Isfjord radio hotel in Kapp Linné.

### 4- Tundra Bean Goose (*Anser fabalis rossicus*) : Rare (fewer than 20 records)

A bird found in Adventdalen on 5<sup>th</sup> August with a Pink-footed and some Barnacles during my last session of birdwatching 2 hours before the returning flight !

### 5- Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)

Common around Longyearbyen, seen almost every day. Migratory flights (max. 15 individuals) were seen until the end of June from different locations in the fjord. Always around 200 birds in Adventdalen, with first chicks on 29<sup>th</sup> June.

### 6- Pale-bellied Brant (*Branta bernicla hrota*) : Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)

One or several groups were seen almost daily in Adventfjorden around the bird observatory with a maximum of 51 birds on 19<sup>th</sup> June. I have seen also one group of 20 birds in Colesbukta on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 25 birds in Adventdalen the 29<sup>th</sup> of June.



Tundra Bean Goose (*Anser fabalis rossicus*), Leucistic Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) and Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*), all seen in the Adventfjorden area

7- Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) : *Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)*

Very common on all site visited in and around Longyearbyen, first chicks seen the 25<sup>th</sup> of June. Always several hundreds of birds in Adventdalen at every visit (more than 1000 counted in the end of July). Two different leucistic birds were present in the area.

8- Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) : *Rare (fewer than 20 records)*

A pleasant finding in the beginning of my stay close to the dog kennel of Longyearbyen on 5<sup>th</sup> June. The bird was seen only one day, close but never with the Barnacle Geese. At least, I'm more confident with the origin of this bird than with those seen in western Europe.

9- Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima borealis*) : *Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)*

A very common species, seen daily in every sites monitored in Isfjorden, around 30 pairs breed around the dog kennel of Longyearbyen to avoid the predation of the fox. Chicks were seen also in the camping place, in Grumantbyen, in Diabasodden in the end of June. Males began to moult in the beginning of July and the number of birds are slowly decreasing from the end of June...

10- King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*) : *Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)*

Almost daily seen around Longyearbyen in June, several pairs in the camping site and some individuals regularly in Adventfjorden with Common Eiders. I have also seen the species in Adventdalen in the beginning of June. More than 145 (!) were counted in the bay of Colesbukta the 26<sup>th</sup> June, mostly males with some 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> summer individuals. The species is much more discrete during July, some males spread with Common Eiders and 3 chicks with 4 females in Isdammen on 25<sup>th</sup> July (seen until the 5<sup>th</sup> of August) .

11- Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) : *Frequent, annual occurrence in small numbers*

2 males together in the bay of Colesbukta on 26<sup>th</sup> June

12- Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) : *Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)*

Some pairs in different locations seen almost every day until mid-July: one around the camping site, one in Isdammen. 4 birds, apparently 2 pairs in the bay of Colesbukta on 26<sup>th</sup> June. 2 pairs again around the Kapp Linné on 7<sup>th</sup> July. In late July, only one female was always present in Isdammen.

13- Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) : *Frequent, annual occurrence in small numbers*

1 male seen on 11<sup>th</sup> June, first in Adventfjorden then in Isdammen. Then 3 males together in Isdammen during one week around the 20<sup>th</sup> of June.

14- Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) : *Rare (fewer than 20 records)*

1 male in eclipse plumage on 15<sup>th</sup> July in Gåsøyane with the other waders ! What a view of a flock with 4 species of non-breeding ducks (Pintail, Wigeon, Teal and Shoveler) on this day. Probable 6<sup>th</sup> records for Svalbard.

15- Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) : *Frequent, annual occurrence in small numbers*

Maximum of two pairs simultaneously, one pair stayed for almost one month close to the dog kennel in Longyearbyen, the other was seen along the road just after Isdammen. The dog kennel pair moved in the camping place on 16<sup>th</sup> July. One male in eclipse on 15<sup>th</sup> July in Gåsøyane.



1. Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Colesbukta– 26/06/2018
2. Common eider (*Somateria mollissima borealis*) – Longyearbyen – 06/06/2018
3. King eider (*Somateria spectabilis*) – Adventdalen, Isdammen – 07/06/2018
4. Svalbard ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta hyperborea*) – Longyearbyen – 06/06/2018
5. Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*) – Adventdalen – 25/06/2018
6. Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) – Grumantbyen – 03/07/2018





Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) and Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

**16- Eurasian Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) : Occasional (relatively frequent occasional visitor)**

4 birds (2 males and 2 females) in Isdammen on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1 male in eclipse plumage on 15<sup>th</sup> July in Gåsøyane, still there on 30<sup>th</sup> July.

**17- Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*) : Frequent, annual occurrence in small numbers**

4 in Adventdalen on June, 7 in the Camping place on 25<sup>th</sup> June and at least 5 with females and eclipse males in Gåsøyane on 15<sup>th</sup> July. 31 (!) birds were in Gåsøyane on 30<sup>th</sup> July (a record for Svalbard?).

**18- Svalbard Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta hyperborea*) : Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)**

Not really abundant around Longyearbyen, but easy to see in good places. The easiest place is probably the road going up to the mine still in activity at the end of the valley. Another good place is the road going to the shooting place above the airport. Otherwise, one pair was staying close to our house in Longyearbyen in June and a pair was close to the glacier still in Longyearbyen. One female in Bjorndalen on 1<sup>st</sup> July, a male in Diabasodden on 3<sup>rd</sup> July.

**19- Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) : Common but dispersed breeder**

Quite common around Longyearbyen, up to three birds regularly seen around the camping place, and between 2 and 5 birds seen at every visit in the Adventdalen area. One seen in Noisedalen in June, several alarming birds in Kapp Linné on 6<sup>th</sup> July.

**20- Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)**

The most common shorebird in Svalbard, seen daily absolutely everywhere in each site visited. The record number is 190 counted at low tide in the Adventfjorden the 11<sup>th</sup> of June. One chick with alarming and displaying parents was seen in Kapp Linné on 7<sup>th</sup> July. Another big chick and my first juveniles in the camping place area in the beginning of August.

**21- Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) : Uncommon annual breeder**

2 adult birds seen in the tundra meadow after the dog kennel of Longyearbyen on 21<sup>th</sup> July.

**22- Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) : Common but dispersed breeder**

Often seen in the area around the dog kennel of Longyearbyen and away in the tundra meadow after Isdammen with between 3-5 birds seen (14 birds together on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 20 with 2 first year birds on 26<sup>th</sup> July). Several males were displaying in flight above the road during June. First juvenile seen on 21<sup>st</sup> of July, then 7 together with one adult in Isdammen on 28<sup>th</sup> July.

23- Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) : *Common but dispersed breeder*

2 birds seen in flight from the cliff of Noisedalen on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2 others foraging in a tundra meadow near Isdammen on 9<sup>th</sup> July.

24- Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) : *Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)*

Quite common around Longyearbyen, one pair frequently seen at the beginning of the season in mid-June around the camping place, several birds often seen around the dog kennel and at least 2 pairs in Adventdalen often seen in the tundra meadow close to Isdammen. The species began to be very discreet after mid-July. A pair also seen in Gåsøyane on 6<sup>th</sup> July, then a single individual on 30<sup>th</sup> July.

25- Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) : *Uncommon annual breeder*

Only seen 3 times in June in Adventdalen or just after Isdammen, firstly one male alone, then a pair and finally a female alone. The species is rare in Svalbard and the Longyearbyen area is one of the best places to see this species.

26- Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) : *Frequent, annual occurrence in small numbers*

Only one sighting of two adult pale morph birds flying along the camping place during a very windy day on 27<sup>th</sup> June. The species doesn't breed in Svalbard, I was particularly happy to see this species which is not so easy to see in breeding plumage in France...

27- Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) : *Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)*

The most common skua in Isfjorden and Svalbard, daily seen. Some pairs breeds in Longyearbyen, close to the Unis building and close to the river (a mixed pair with a dark morph) with frequent attacks on the way of our home. The species was also contacted on our different sites in Diabasodden, Grumantbyen etc... Another dark bird (I guess the same) was often seen in end of June in Adventfjorden. 2-3 pairs were always attacking the terns and the kittiwakes in Adventfjorden in late July.

28- Long-tailed Skua (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) : *Uncommon annual breeder*

A rare breeding bird in Svalbard where there is no lemmings for them: one adult near the camping place the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, two birds together chasing Arctic Terns in Adventfjorden on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, one doing the same on 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> July. One in Kapp Linné on 7<sup>th</sup> July.

29- Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*) : *Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)*

Often seen at sea but rarely from Longyearbyen: One adult bird was seen from the camping on 27<sup>th</sup> June. One adult bird with missing internal primaries was often seen on the way to Grumantbyen, some others (with some brownish immature birds) were seen almost weekly in Isfjorden. At least 2 pairs were breeding in Gåsøyane on 6<sup>th</sup> July and a probable pair in Kapp Linné on 7<sup>th</sup> July.

30- Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) : *Frequent, annual occurrence in small numbers*

One 3cy bird seen on 23<sup>rd</sup> June during a windy day in a flock of Kittiwakes from the coast near Bjorndalen, too far to identify a putative subspecies. Maybe another one very far in Adventfjorden on 27<sup>th</sup> June.

31- Greater Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) : *Common but dispersed breeder*

A scarce bird in the fjord where some pairs are dispersed. I saw one in Adventfjorden foraging in a Glaucous flock on 27<sup>th</sup> June, a probable one (actually a "black-primary" 2cy gull in the other side of the fjord with a glaucous size) on June, a 2cy bird in the camping place on 19<sup>th</sup> July. At least 6 birds with 2 obvious breeding pairs were seen in Gåsøyane on 6<sup>th</sup> July, still there on 15<sup>th</sup> July. We counted around 6-7 flying juveniles in Gåsøyane on 30<sup>th</sup> July.





3cy Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*; probably a small female), and putative hybrid Glaucous x Herring Gull (*Larus hyperboreus x argentatus*)

**32- Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus hyperboreus*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par**

Common in and around Longyearbyen with sometimes almost 100 birds gathering in the camping place with 2cy, 3cy and 4cy birds. My first flying juvenile was seen in Adventdalen on 28<sup>th</sup> July, then it was frequent to see pairs with one or two juveniles at low tide in Adventfjorden.

The subspecies *hyperboreus* breeding in Spitzberg and Jan Mayen appeared to be smaller than birds frequently seen in Western Europe during winters which probably come from Greenland... A bit skeptical in the beginning of my stay about the size of these birds, I admitted that a lot of birds recalling *glaucoides* by their size/shape were encountered very often... GLS put on those birds (in Kongsfjorden) showed that Glaucous Gulls from Svalbard spent winters mostly in three places : Northern Norway, the north coast of Iceland and around Bjornoya. Samples were took to future genetic studies. Otherwise I saw a very atypical bird maybe a small female with particular long wings very recalling an Iceland Gull.

**32'- Hybrid Glaucous x Herring Gull (*Larus hyperboreus x argentatus*) : Frequent, annual occurrence in small numbers**

One bird might be a good candidate, it was seen around the dog kennel of Longyearbyen between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> of June. A primary pattern which could be possible for a northern *argentatus argentatus* but with black edges very diffuse and a very pale mantle...

**33- Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*) : Frequent, annual occurrence in small numbers**

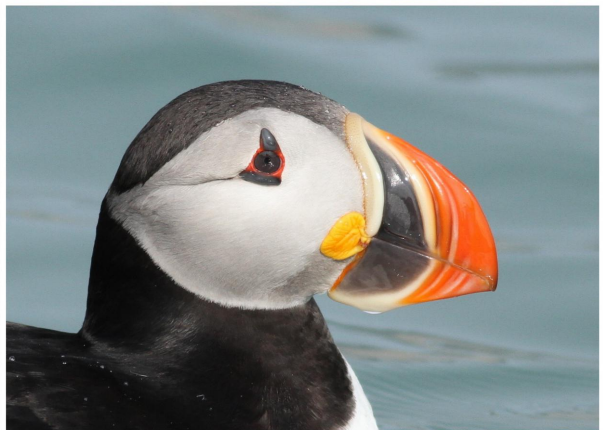
One 2cy bird quickly seen in flight along the coast from Bjorndalen on 16<sup>th</sup> June. Some Iceland Gulls were announced during June in Avdentfjorden, but the species is not so easy to detect in the middle of the small Glaucous subspecies.

**34- Black-headed Gull (*Croicocephalus ridibundus*) : Occasional (relatively frequent occasional visitor)**

One 2cy bird seen in the camping place during two days on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> July. Then seen around the dog kennel of Longyearbyen from 21<sup>st</sup> of July until the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, at least.

**35- Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)**

A very common bird in Svalbard, daily seen at sea. We monitored two colonies in Grumantbyen and Pyramiden where birds followed by GPS shows interesting patterns of foraging strategies, often coming in the camping place and Colesbukta to take a bath in fresh water then going straight in the ocean out of the fjord for foraging.





1. Little auk (*Alle alle*) – Bjørndalen – 16/07/2018
2. Red-necked phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Adventdalen – 20/06/2018
3. Long-tailed skua (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – Camping place – 16/06/2018
4. Black guillemot (*Cepphus grylle mandtii*) – Gasøyane – 06/07/2018
5. Purple sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) – Longyearbyen – 09/07/2018
6. Brunnich's guillemot (*Uria lomvia*) – Diabasodden – 17/07/2018
7. Arctic tern with chicks (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Longyearbyen – 26/07/2018
8. Atlantic puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) - Tunabreen glacier – 31/07/2018

### **36- Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*) : Common but dispersed breeder**

Of course the most expected bird of this trip. I finally managed to find one of this bird on 29<sup>th</sup> June very far in the other side of Isdammen, but the bird was relocated three days after close to the dog kennel after Isdammen waiting for eating dog poops. A bird (maybe the same) seen in the same conditions, first flying above Isdammen then around the dog kennels of Adventdalen on 24<sup>th</sup> July. A bird was sitting on the roof of the dog kennel of Longyearbyen on 3<sup>rd</sup> August for some minutes then a last sighting of a bird in the river at the end of the road in Adventdalen on 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2 hours before the departure. Difficult to be affirmative but it might be always the same bird... Not easy to see this species in the Longyearbyen area, especially this year with only my own sighting in the whole month of June. Usually, it's at least 2-3 individuals which stay some days around dog kennels during each month of June and July...

### **37- Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)**

Common species daily seen in Longyearbyen, sometimes encountered on the sea and frequently from the other sites : Grumantbyen, Diabasodden, Pyramidene... On 27<sup>th</sup> June, at least 5 second-year old birds were in the camping place around the colony, I didn't know that immatures come back after their first migration...

### **38- Brunnich's Guillemot (*Uria lomvia*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)**

Common species daily seen in the Isfjorden, some birds forage in Adventfjorden in front of the bird observatory. The species is unfortunately drastically declining... Even if the Common Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) is becoming more and more present far north of this past distribution, I didn't see this species in Isfjorden.

### **39- Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)**

Common species daily seen which appreciate to be laying on the harbor decks. This *mandtii* subspecies (different from the mainland subspecies) winters around the archipelago and around northern Norway, it shows a greater white patch on the wing and present a whitish winter plumage than the nominate. Some pairs breed in cracks in the cliff along the road going to the harbor and above Longyearbyen.

### **40- Little Auk (*Alle alle*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)**

The most abundant species in Svalbard according to some, flying like Starling flocks around Longyearbyen. The species is easy to see in Adventfjorden and around. Some birds breed in the direction of the glacier and in the direction of Bjørndalen, of course is not recommended to go across colonies to approach them, they lay their eggs just under rocks in very unstable places...

### **41- Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) : Abundant annual breeder (> 10 000 par)**

Quite easy to see in the mouth of Adventfjorden especially in July. Birds caught for monitoring were clearly bigger than birds from mainland populations (more than 200g of weight !), bio-loggers were put to see where the northernmost population spend winter.



**42- White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) : Occasional (relatively frequent occasional visitor)**

One bird found on 16<sup>th</sup> June around the dog kennel of Longyearbyen. The species apparently bred here in Longyearbyen last year. Other sightings, most likely from the same bird, were realized around the dog kennel in June and July.

**43- Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) : Rare (fewer than 20 records)**

One juvenile (probably from last year) found dead by a colleague around the lake of Kapp Linné on 7<sup>th</sup> July. Pointy tail feathers and round secondaries signed for a juvenile, probable 6<sup>th</sup> records for Svalbard.

**44- Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) : Common annual breeder (< 10 000 par)**

The only breeding passerine of Svalbard, very common in all places visited. Some nest boxes are located close to the bird observatory. First chicks were heard very early in the season during a visit of Pyramiden on 13<sup>th</sup> June, and I saw some of them feed by parents in Grumantbyen on 26<sup>th</sup> June. A flock of 12 chicks was present in mid-July around our home in Longyearbyen mostly resulting of the grouping of two families. It seems that birds nesting in the city have more chicks than those breeding “in the wild”.

## MAMMALS



Arctic fox (*Fulves lagopus*), Polar bear (*Ursus maritima*), both around Longyearbyen and flighting cubs of Arctic Fox in Diabasodden

### 1- Svalbard Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus platyrhynchus*) :

This short-legged subspecies is very common everywhere around Longyearbyen, even in the city. A first calf seen in Bjorndalen on 21<sup>st</sup> July and a big male crossing by the bay then Isdammen by swimming on 24<sup>th</sup> July.

### 2- Arctic Fox (*Fulves lagopus*) :

Not so common around Longyearbyen (most of them were killed some years ago after a rabies epidemic) but not very hard to see. I've seen the species at almost every visit in Bjorndalen, regularly in Grumantbyen... A den with 3 cubs was seen with nice views of the cubs playing together.

### 3- Polar Bear (*Ursus maritima*)

The unexpected. Quite rare in Isfjorden during summer, the Polar Bear rarely approach Longyearbyen, but we were lucky this year with a big male trying to cross the bay in the direction of the city on 8<sup>th</sup> June, 3 days after our arrival. The bear was maybe less than 1km away, the helicopter of the Sysselmannen came to scare him. Another bear was seen in Deltaneset (between Longyearbyen and Diabasodden), eating on a carcass of a Minke Whale, but we didn't see it. Some footprints probably belonging to this bear were found around the windows of the cabin that we frequently used in Diabasodden, a bit frightening...

### 4- Harbour/Common Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Seen in Gasoyane on 6<sup>th</sup> July, then the 7<sup>th</sup> in Kapp Linné with a lonely individual in the river close to the lake then 17 laying on the shore close to the cap.

### 5- Bearded Seal (*Erignathus barbatus*)

One seen during our only visit in the glacier of in Templefjord. Bearded and Ringed Seals are usually more common in Isfjorden according to my colleagues...

### 6- Walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*)

A very unexpected sighting very close to Longyearbyen with an individual swimming along the coast of Bjorndalen on 22<sup>nd</sup> July. It was most likely a young individual with small teeth.

#### 7- Beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas*)

This species is probably the easiest sea mammal species to see around Longyearbyen with regular good views. Every year several groups are announced close to the shore in Longyearbyen. It was a relatively bad year and I managed to see them 5 times in total. First with 8 individuals from the Little Auk colony in Bjorndalen on 10<sup>th</sup> June, then a group of 10 from the cliffs of Diabas with amazing views of several individuals going along the coast just at the bottom of the cliff. A group of 20 individuals with at least one grey calf seen two times in Adventfjorden very close to the shore in the small harbor on 19<sup>th</sup> July then in front of Bjorndalen the day after. Finally, an alone individual briefly seen in Grumantbyen on 30<sup>th</sup> July.

#### 8- Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)

What a memory ! A first sighting from Grumantbyen of two whales constantly diving with amazing tail views during almost 2 hours on 14<sup>th</sup> June. The second sighting was on 26<sup>th</sup> June after leaving Colesbukta, some sprays were noticed far from the boat then nothing during some minutes, and finally 6 Blue Whales around us ! They were so close that I didn't manage to take good pictures at the beginning with my big lens... What an amazing sighting with some views less than 100 meters...

#### 9- Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

Two sightings of this small whale (compare to the previous one) from the cliffs of Diabas. We have also seen several times drifting piece of whale fat coming probably from hunting boats...

#### 10- Humpack Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

A Humpack stayed during two days in Adventfjorden from the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, always following by some hundreds of Kittiwakes. The whale flapped his tail on a yacht hankered in the bay, with no apparent reason...



Beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas* ; above) and Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*; below) both seen from the cliffs of Diabasodden

You can find all my pictures from this trip:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/92211588@N08/albums/72157668258544547>