

ICELAND

29. 6. 2019 – 12. 7. 2019



Northern Fulmar, Eyjafjörður, 10.7.2019, © Thomas Ranner

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Introduction

This two-week trip combined visiting and photographing just some of the many spectacular landscapes in Iceland and birdwatching. We rented a car out of Keflavik airport and visited the southern, western and northern parts of the island.

Short itinerary

28.-29.6.2019: Evening flight from Vienna to Keflavik, arrival close to midnight. Picking up our rental car and driving to our hotel in Reykjavik for some short sleep.

29.6.2019: A full day in Reykjavik, including a visit to the small town lake Tjörninn which produced the first **Pink-footed Goose** for this trip.

30.6.-3.7.2019: South coast of Iceland. We started at Selfoss to catch up with a **Lesser Scaup** that had been reported from here since late May. Our itinerary included several scenic sites east to Stokksnes peninsula, most notably the spectacular Jökulsarlón, and also Sakftafell national park. Notable species, that were seen only in the south, included **Barnacle Goose**, **Goosander** and **Great Skua**. But we also found the first **Harlequin Duck**, **Glaucous Gulls** and **Snow Bunting** of the trip.

4.-7.7.2019: Snaefellsnes. After visiting the „golden circle“ and driving past Borgarnes we stayed a few days on this peninsula on the west coast of Iceland. It offers spectacular scenery and fine birdwatching. Some of the remarkable species included **Great Northern Diver**, **Rock Ptarmigan**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **Glaucous Gull**, **Iceland Gull**, **Snow Bunting** and even **Arctic Fox**. Large seabird colonies and the small, but ornithologically most rewarding pond at the village of Rif amidst a huge colony of **Arctic Terns** and holding nearly 300 **Red-necked Phalaropes** were additional highlights. On 7th we left the peninsula and headed to the north of the island, staying one night at Laugarbakki.

8.-11.7.2019: Driving via Blönduós (Iceland Gull on the river mouth) and Akureyri (various passerines in the small forest Kjarnaskógur) we finally arrived at Reykjahlid for a few days stay in the area of lake Myvatn. We visited several geothermal sites and of course Dimmu Borgir and enjoyed very fine birdwatching on the lake and along Laxa river. Among the many species seen **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Harlequin Duck**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common Scoter**, more **Rock Ptarmigans**, **Slavonian Grebe** and **Gyrfalcon** were the most noteworthy. We also made a short trip to the small lake Holkotstjörn to see an **American Wigeon** that had been reported from there. We did not find it (luckily we discovered one on lake Myvatn later that day!) but instead we found a summer-plumaged **Black-throated Diver**. Soon some birders arrived and we were told that it had actually been discovered two days ago and that it was Iceland's second! We also made a whale-watching tour in the Eyjafjörður, but this was totally unsuccessful, except some very photogenic **Fulmars** following the boat.

11.-12.7.2019: On our way back we once again had an overnight stop at Laugarbakki. Along the road we found a flock of **Pink-footed Geese** at the river Nordura, two **Iceland Gulls** and a drake **King Eider** at Blönduós and nearby a spectacular **Gyrfalcon** almost colliding with our car! We also visited the inner Borgafjörður to add **Common Shelduck** to our triplist. Finally we arrived at Keflavik. Before returning our car we did some seawatching at Gardur lighthouse. This was very rewarding with big numbers of **Manx Shearwaters**, some waders and a pod of **Orcas**. In the middle of the night and with some delay, at 1 am on 13.7., our plane departed towards Vienna.

Bird List (77 species)

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*): Widespread, seen on 13 out of 14 days. Mostly in pairs or family groups, small flocks included 20 at Selfoss on 30.6., 10 flying past Hvitserkur rock on 7.7. and 15 in Borgarfjörður on 12.7. Besides it was very numerous on lake Myvatn.

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*): 1 obviously paired to a Greylag Goose was at lake Tjörnin in Reykjavik on 29.6. A flock of 22 adults and juveniles was on large gravel fields northwest of Höfn on 1.7. and a flock of 33 in similar habitat in the Nordura valley near Silfrastadir on 11.7.

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*): Widespread and numerous, seen on 11 days. The largest flock were approx. 3000 in the northwestern part of Lake Myvatn on 10.7.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*): Commonly found along the south coast near Jökulsarlón and Reynivellir from 30.6.-2.7.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*): Approx. 100 (adults with large groups of pulli) were in inner Borgarfjörður on 12.7.

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*): 1 was in Reykjavik on 29.6. Common around Akureyri and in the wider Myvatn area from 8.-11.7.

American Wigeon (*Anas americana*): 1 adult male in the northwestern part of lake Myvatn on 9.7.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*): 2 adults and 5 juveniles were in Reykjavik on 29.6. Common on lake Myvatn and also on lake Vestmannsvatn from 9.-10.7.

Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*): 6 were in Reykjavik on 29.6., 4 near Grenstangi on 2.7., 1 at Rif on 5.7., 1 near Akureyri airport on 8.7. and 2 on lake Myvatn on 10.7.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*): Seen every day.

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*): 1 female with 4 juveniles on lake Holkotstjörn on 9.7. and approx. 15 on lake Myvatn on 10.7.

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*): 1-2 females on lake Myvatn on 9. and 10.7.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*): Common and widespread, seen on seven days.

Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*): 5 were in Reykjavik on 29.6. Other observations were made at Selfoss on 30.6. and on lake Myvatn on 8.-10.7.

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*): We succeeded in spotting the long-staying male at Selfoss on 30.6.

Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*): Common and widespread along the coast, including many females with chicks and large moulting flocks of (predominantly) males.

King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*): 1 male was in a flock of Common Eiders at Blönduós on 11.7.

Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*): Quite surprisingly a splendid male was in a ditch near Grenstangi in the evening of 2.7. Two females were at Olafsvik on 6.7. and a male flew along the coast near Arnarstapi on the same date. Several observations were made on Laxa river upstream

of the bridge near Myvatn on 9.7. with a sleeping male, a female with 6 pulli and 6 more female-type birds.

Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*): Up to 15 were in the western part of lake Myvatn on 9. and 10.7.

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*): Seen on lake Myvatn and nearby Laxa river on 9. and 10.7. with at least 50 individuals.

Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*): Two females were on river Laxa on 9.7. In a bay in the western part of lake Myvatn up to 250, mainly males, could be spotted in a large mixed duck flock on 9. and 10.7.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*): 5 on lake Tjörnin in Reykjavik on 29.6., 2 at Selfoss on 30.6., 1 northwest of Höfn on 3.7. and 3 flying along the coast near the Jökulsarlón on the same evening, 3 in Kolgrafarfjörður on 5.7., 1 at Laugarbakki on 7.7., 1 on river Laxa on 9.7. and finally 1 each in Borgarfjörður and at Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*): The only observation was a female with Common Eiders on the sea at Stokksnes on 1.7.

Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*): Surprisingly often found: The first was near Hellissandur on 6.7., 1 was at Laugarbakki on 7.7., a female with 7 chicks on the lava field near Leirhnjúkur on 8.7., another female with 8 chicks was at Stóragjá on 10.7. and a calling male was right behind our holiday house at Reykjahlid on 11.7.!

Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*): Widespread, seen on eleven days, mostly singly or in pairs.

Black-throated Diver (*Gavia arctica*): While searching for an American Wigeon reported from here two days ago we found a full summer plumaged Black-throated Diver on Holkotstjörn on 9.7. From arriving birders we heard that it had actually also been discovered two days ago and that it was only the second for Iceland.

Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*): The first was on a small lake in the eastern part of Snaefellsnes on 4.7., 1 adult with 2 chicks was near the Kirkjufell in the night from 4.-5.7. 1 was on the sea at Buthir on 6.7. and 1 was on lake Ljósavatn on 8.7. 2 adults with 1 chick were on lake Vestmannsvatn on 9.7. On 11.7. we saw 1 on the sea at Blönduós and 1 was flying by while we were on the road. And finally on 12.7. we saw 2 at Gardur lighthouse and 1 in Keflavik harbour.

Slavonian Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*): The first 4 were on a small pond in Akureyri on 8.7. The species was common on lake Myvatn from 9.-11.7., on 9.7. we also found it on the lakes Holkotstjörn and Vestmannsvatn.

Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*): Widespread and very common, seen on all but two days. It seemed as if they were sitting (but not necessarily breeding) in virtually every rock face, not only on the coast but also quite far inland.

Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*): 1 was seen from the black beach at Reynisfjara on 3.7., but more than 100 passed Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*): Approx. 40 were on the sea at Öndvertharnes lighthouse and 1 was at Hellnar on 5.7., at least 150 were at Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*): 5 were at Borgarnes on 4.7., 1 at Hellnar on 6.7. and on 12.7. 2 were in Borgarfjörður and 3 at Gardur lighthouse.

European Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*): On 5.7. 1 was at Öndvertharnes lighthouse and 4 at Svörtuloft lighthouse, on 6.7. we saw a colony near Arnarstapi with single birds flying till Hellnar.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*): We saw only one, near the Fjadrargljúfur-gorge on 2.7.

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*): One was chased by two Arctic Skuas high over the Fuglasafni museum at lake Myvatn on 9.7. Surprisingly the same scene happened again along the ringroad southwest of Blönduós on 11.7., but this time much closer and the falcon was chased across the road right in front of our car, actually we were lucky not to hit it!

Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*): Widespread and common along the coast, but more so in the south. Except the two days in the wider Myvatn area we saw it every day.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*): Widespread, seen on all but one days, although it was nowhere really common.

European Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*): Widespread and common on meadows, pastures and heathland. Seen on all but one day.

Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*): 4 were at Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*): 10 at Selfoss on 30.6., 1 at Grenstangi on 3.7., approx. 80 at Rif on 5. and 6.7., approx. 15 at Blönduós on 8.7., approx. 100 in a river delta east of Sauthármkrokur on 11.7. and 2 at Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*): 1 was at Olafsvík on 6.7. and 1 in Hvammstangi harbour on 11.7.

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*): Widespread and common, almost everywhere on meadows, pastures, heathlands and even in birch forests. Seen every day, but commoner in the south.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*): Widespread and common in all kinds of open landscape, even on almost bare Hrauns (black lava fields). Seen on all but one day, but commoner in the south.

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*): The least common of the meadow-breeding waders. We saw it on eleven days, but mostly only single or few individuals. The largest flocks were 4 flying over Skogafoss on 2.7. and 6 at Grenstangi on 3.7. The birds belong to the subspecies *islandica*, but not all birds were distinctly brighter coloured than continental breeders.

Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*): Widespread and common, seen every day.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*): 2 were on the small lake in Rif on 6.7. and 3 at Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*): Seen on ten days, the first was already on a small pond next to Reykjavík city airport. Common at all sorts of water bodies, but outstanding was a large concentration on the small lake in Rif, with 287 on 5.7. and 277 on 6.7.

Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*): Widespread along and near the coasts, mostly common. Seen on all but one day.

Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*): Widespread and quite common from 30.6.-3.7. along the south coast, mainly on the large Sandur plains and around Jökulsarlón.

Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*): 1 immature among Kittiwakes on a jetty in Hellnar in the evening of 5.7. was quite a surprise.

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*): Common at large seabird colonies and along the coasts, albeit not everywhere. Large colonies were at Svörtuloft lighthouse, at Londrangar, Hellnar and Arnarstapi. Seen on eight days.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*): Widespread and common, seen every day.

Common Gull (*Larus canus*): Up to 10 were at Grenstangi on 2.-3.7., 1 was on lake Valavatn on Snaefellsnes on 5.-6.7. On 8.7. several observations between Akureyri and lake Myvatn. On 10.7. it was found numerous between Akureyri and Hjalteyri and on 11.7. several were seen around Sauthárkrokur.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*): Widespread and often common. Seen on all but two days.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*): Widespread, seen on eleven days, albeit mostly singly or just few birds.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoideus*): One of the highlights of this trip: 1 in second summer plumage was at Olafsvik on 6.7., and among large gulls in the river mouth at Blönduós 2 first summer birds were found on 8.7. and 1 first summer bird on 11.7.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*): At least 2 adults and 1 hybrid with Herring Gull (Nelson's Gull) were at a small Herring Gull colony at Stokksnes on 1.7. On 5.7. several were found along the north coast of Snaefellsnes, but 74 were in Kolgrafarfjörður. On the next day we found it quite common along the coasts of Snaefellsnes, among them a pair with 2 pulli on a rock needle near Arnarstapi and 2 hybrids with Herring Gull at Olafsvik. 4 first summer birds were in the river mouth at Blönduós on 11.7.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*): Widespread and common along the coasts, seen on nine days.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*): Seen every day. It was simply everywhere!

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*): 1 was off Stokksnes on 1.7. Approx. 10 were off Reynisfjara on 3.7. Colonies were seen at Svörtuloft lighthouse, near Hellnar and Londrangar on 5.7. A few birds were off Hellnar on 6.7. Many Guillemots were passing Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*): 3 were in the mixed seabird colony at Svörtuloft lighthouse on 5.7., actually it seemed as if they were paired with Common Murres.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*): The first was off Kirkjufjara on 30.6. It was quite numerous (> 60) on the sea off Jökulsarlón on 1.7. Colonies were seen at Svörtuloft lighthouse, near Hellnar and Londrangar on 5.7. A few birds were off Hellnar on 6.7. Many Razorbills were passing Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*): 3 were off Kirkjufjara on 30.6. On 1.7. 2 were off Stokksnes and at least 100 on the sea off Jökulsarlón; at least 150 were off Reynisfjara on 3.7.; on 5.7. a few were

seen off Svörtuloft lighthouse and 1 off Londrangar and finally many Puffins were passing Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Black Guillemot (*Cephus grylle*): 1 off Reynisfjara on 3.7.; on 5.7. 1 in Kolgrafarfjörður and 1 at Hellnar; approx. 10 between Hellnar and Arnarstapi on 6.7.; 3 at Hvitserkur rock on 7.7. and on 10.7. 1 at Hjalteyri and 5 in Eyjafjörður.

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*): The only of the trip was flying over the ringroad near Seljalandsfoss in the night of 2.7.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*): Probably the commonest passerine, widespread and abundant, seen every day.

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*): Widespread and common, but by far not that common as Meadow Pipit. Seen on all but one day.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*): The first of the trip was singing at Seljalandsfoss on 30.6. 3 were singing in Skaftafell national park on 2.7., one of these gave very good views. 2 were singing in Kjarnaskógur forest on 8.7. On 9.7. 1 each was singing at Dimmu Borgir and at the Laxa river upstream of the bridge. On Iceland this species is represented by the large endemic subspecies *islandicus*.

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*): A family with 1 juvenile and an additional female were near Svinafellsjökull on 30.6.; 6 were at Stokksnes on 1.7.; 1 was in Snaefellsjökull national park on 5.7.; on 6.7. 2 were at Buthir and family flocks were south of Rif and near Hellissandur; 2 were at the crater lake near Hellnar on 7.7.; a juvenile was on the lava field near Leirhnjúkur on 8.7.; another juvenile was at Dimmu Borgir on 9.7. and finally 1 was next to the ringroad on 11.7. Icelandic birds belong to the larger and brightly coloured subspecies *leucorhoa*.

Common Blackbird (*Turdus merula*): 2 were in Reykjavik on 29.6. and 1 in Kjarnaskógur forest on 8.7.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*): Widespread and common, seen every day. Icelandic birds belong to the darker subspecies *coburni*.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*): 2 were in Kjarnaskógur forest on 8.7.

Northern Raven (*Corvus corax*): Widespread, seen on all but two days. Mostly singly, family parties with fledged young were at Hellnar resp. on Snaefellsnes on 5. and 6.7.

Common Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*): Common in Reykjavik on 29.-30.6., approx. 50 near Laugarvatni on 4.7., 1 juvenile in Olafsvik on 6.7., common in Akureyri on 8.7., on 10.7. 1 carrying food in Akureyri and 3 in Hjalteyri, on 11.7. 1 in Akureyri and 1 in Laugarbakki and finally common again in and around Reykjavik on 12.7.

Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*): A few birds in Reykjavik on 29.6., 4 in Skaftafell national park on 2.7., on 8.7. 1 near Akureyri airport, at least 15 in Kjarnaskógur forest and 2 at lake Myvatn on 10.7. Icelandic birds belong to the larger subspecies *rostrata*.

Common Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*): 2 were in Kjarnaskógur forest on 8.7.

Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*): A male was singing at Jökulsarlón on 1.7., another near the Kirkjufell on 4.7. On 5.7. 3 were at various spots in Snaefellsjökull national park and 2 at lake Valavatn. A male carrying food was at Hellnar on 5.-7.7.

Mammal List

Arctic Fox (*Alopex lagopus*): 1 was near our holiday house at Hellnar at 0.50 on 5.7.!

Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*): Approx. 10 on sandbanks near Jökulsarlón on 30.6.-1.7. and also approx. 10 at Hvitserkur rock on 7.7.

Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*): 2 were at Gardur lighthouse on 12.7.

Orca (*Orcinus orca*): One of the highlights of the trip was a pod of at least 15 individuals off Gardur lighthouse on 12.7., twice „spyhopping“ collectively!

Domestic Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*): Several, obviously belonging to a feral population, were roaming Kjarnaskógur forest on 8.7.



Pink-footed Goose, lake Tjörnin, 29.6.2019
© Andreas Ranner



Greater Scaup, lake Tjörnin, 29.6.2019
© Andreas Ranner



Great Skua, Jökulsarlón, 1.7.2019
© Andreas Ranner



Common Snipe, Reynivellir, 1.7.2019
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Red-necked Phalarope, Stokksnes, 1.7.2019
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Redwing, Skaftafell national park, 2.7.2019
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Whimbrel, Eldhraun, 2.7.2019
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Snow Bunting, Hellnar, 6.7.2019
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Glaucous Gull, Buthir, 6.7.2019
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Glaucous Gull, Olafsvik, 6.7.2019
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Iceland Gull, Olafsvik, 6.7.2019
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Arctic Tern, Rif, 5.7.2019
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Arctic Skua, Myvatn, 9.7.2019
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Common Scoter, Myvatn, 9.7.2019
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Harlequin Ducks, Laxa river, 9.7.2019
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King Eider, Blönduós, 11.7.2019
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