

Trip Report

Iceland

May 18 - June 5, 2022

Overview

This trip was planned for my girlfriend Lynda and me to get away to explore an interesting country, and do a little birding at the same time. Iceland has a fascinating geological history, and as I was planning our route, I came to realize that, despite being widely-travelled, I had never visited a country quite like it before.

We chose to go early in the season, before the heavy influx of tourists in the summer. Nevertheless, the most famous tourist sites were quite busy, but it was still possible to find solitude at a remote lesser-known waterfall, or at some lonely cliff where you could stare out over the ocean and watch the birds catching the air majestically right in front of you. We circumnavigated the country following the ring road (as many people do), taking offshoots here and there, and we chose to head in a counterclockwise direction. We wanted to leave the north and west of Iceland for last since that's where we were most likely to encounter challenging weather, and we wanted to leave if for as late as possible into spring.

Birding was not the primary focus of the trip, but we birded continuously wherever we were. Not ever having done any birding in Europe, Iceland did have a few new species for me to track down. Overall, we were pretty successful, and I ended up adding 11 new species to my life list: Pink-footed Goose, Common Scoter, European Golden Plover, Great Skua, Parasitic Jaeger, Thick-billed Murre, Common Gull, Northern Fulmar, European Shag, Redwing and Meadow Pipit. My biggest miss was Gyr Falcon. I had estimated my chances at about 50-50, with the best locations being around Lake Mývatn and the Westfjords, but it was not to be. It was also disappointing to strike out with Arctic Fox, despite much searching.

For anyone wishing to consider Iceland for a birding trip that extends to include other interests, I hope this report can be of some use. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of any additional assistance.

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Campervan Rental

It goes without saying, Iceland is expensive. For a frugal, budget traveller, this poses challenges. We chose to go the campervan route, thus economizing by combining our transportation and accommodation all in one. There are plenty of campervan companies in Iceland to choose from, offering vehicles of all sizes. We were looking for a two-seater with space for a "queen-size" sleeping area behind the seats, and storage underneath. We debated about whether to have amenities like a sink with running water, but this would have cut down the sleeping space, and we felt it was unnecessary. We brought very warm sleeping bags with us, so we also decided not to get a campervan with an overnight cabin heater. The company we used was Cheap Campervans (<https://cheapcampervans.is>), and the vehicle we rented was a 2-WD, manual transmission Dacia Dokker. It had a large sleeping area with a comfortable mattress and pillows. There was ample storage space under the mattress, and the back doors opened up to provide access to tubs containing utensils, cutlery, cookstove and a cooler that all came with the rental. Other extras (table, chairs, etc.) could have been added for a nominal cost from their user-friendly website.

We were quite happy with the vehicle overall. It handled very well and was easy to drive. Being a 2-WD vehicle, it was not permitted to go on to F-roads, but it was fine on the dirt roads we did explore. Temperatures at night got down into the low single-digits, so we turned on the engine for a few minutes some nights before going to sleep to get a little heat. Not having an overnight heater was not an issue. That said, living out of your car with sometimes no other shelter, with the temperature barely above freezing, and a howling wind is not everyone's cup of tea!

The rental cost for 18 days came to EUR 779, including EUR 35 for an extra driver, and EUR 20 for a camping table. The rental comes with basic CDW insurance, and we paid an extra EUR 5 per day for gravel protection. We forgot to pick up the camping table before departure, and they refunded the charge when we dropped off the vehicle. Pickup and dropoff was easy. We were told a representative would meet us upon arrival at the airport. In practice, the company waits for a cluster of flights to arrive and then sends a representative to collect everyone at once who had made bookings with Cheap Campervans or their partner Happy Campers. We waited at the airport for only a short while. We were shuttled over to their office in Njardvik to deal with the paperwork and we were easily on our way. Dropoff was smooth, and they offered a shuttle service back to the airport for us to make our departing flight. We were very happy with the vehicle, and the customer service was excellent. They even provided a wifi hotspot for free!

Accommodation

Even simple rooms in Iceland go for hundreds of euros per night. Fortunately, there are campgrounds scattered throughout the country that offer a more economical choice. It used to be that you could camp for free anywhere in Iceland, but it is now against the law to do so unless in an established campground. Nevertheless, we did occasionally come across people who had obviously flouted this law, although that can't be encouraged.

Unlike at home, campgrounds in Iceland are big open fields without numbered sites. In some instances, it was more organized with specific spots with electrical service, but for the most part it was simply drive in and park where you want. A virtual complete lack of trees meant that neighbours were always in view. Although we had a daily plan, we wanted to maintain flexibility, and as such, we did not book any campgrounds in advance. This posed no problem as we were never turned away due to the campground being full. As we were early in the season, we did come across one or two campgrounds that had not yet opened, but there was always another alternative. Camping charges were per person, and we paid anything from ISK 1500 to ISK 2000 per person. Amenities varied from place to place. Hot showers were included in the price at some places, but not in others. Some places had a separate cooking hut where you could use their kitchen facilities, some just had a shelter where you could be warm, and some had essentially no facilities aside from toilets/showers. Some places had free use of a washer/dryer, at some places you paid for use of the washer/dryer and other places there were no laundry facilities to speak of. The motto was - take advantage of the free showers and free laundry wherever possible! I will comment on the individual campgrounds in the itinerary section.

Food and Drink

We mostly cooked for ourselves. We brought a few freeze-dried easy-to-prepare meals and other snacks from home. We took advantage of the grocery stores (Netto, Bónus) when we passed through larger centres to stock up on fruit, milk, dry goods and meat/fish, but we ate out occasionally as well. It was disappointing that fresh fish is seemingly so hard to come by in Iceland. Despite fishing being so central to the economy and the identity of Iceland, almost all fish sold in stores is frozen. We had to wait to the end of our trip in Reykjavik to find a market where you could purchase fresh fish. So much for our vision of finding fresh fish to cook each night.

Alcohol is highly regulated in Iceland, and the only place to buy it is from the state-owned Vínbúðin stores, only found in the "larger" towns. We had taken note of a few microbreweries around the country that we intended to visit, only to find out that they cannot sell directly to the public.

Itinerary

Wednesday May 18

Flew Icelandair 602 from Toronto at 21⁰⁰.

Thursday. May 19

Arrived in Keflavik in the morning. Picked up by a rep of Cheap Campervans, taken to nearby office and completed paperwork. Drove to the lighthouse at Garður to do some seawatching. Continued south and eventually east around the Reykjanes Peninsula, stopping briefly at the bridge across two continents. Had a look at the Gunnhver hot springs, which are good for European Golden-Plover, but heavy rain shortened our stay there, and kept us from exploring the Reykjanes lighthouse area. Continued east, stopping for a visit to the Krísuvíkurborg cliffs to search for seabirds, and then on to Selfoss to pick up supplies at the Netto grocery store. Continued east and camped at the Hvolsvöllur campsite which had a small, but nice and warm shelter for cooking/eating.

Friday May 20

Drove to the meeting point for Southcoast Adventures (www.southadventure.is) and joined a superjeep tour day-trip to Þórsmörk. After completing the tour, stopped off to visit the nearby Seljalandsfoss before driving on to Skógar. Camped at the Skógar campsite with a view of the falls.

Saturday May 21

Early view of Skógafoss and then climbed the staircase to the top of the falls and continued along the trail beyond through the valley along the river. Beautiful sunny morning, and we explored the trail for 1-1.5 hours, viewing the secondary falls and cascades, and then returned to camp. Drove to Reynisfjara beach and walked on the black-sand beach before heading to Vik. Had some wonderful soup at the recommended The Soup Company restaurant. After picking up some supplies at a grocery store in Vik, drove on to Skaftafell National Park, first stopping briefly at the Skeiðara bridge monument, and set up camp at the well-organized campsite.

Sunday May 22

Day of hiking in Skaftafell National Park. Night at the park campsite.

Monday May 23

Successful look down a dirt road at Ingólfshöfði for Great Skua, then on to the Kvíárjökull glacier for a short hike. Visited both Fjallsárlon and Jökulsárlon to walk around the lagoons and view the glaciers. Drove on to Höfn and walked around the town and harbour. After picking up supplies in Höfn, we continued on to camp at Stafafell Nature Park and Camping. Kitchen hut and showers were a little scruffy. No owners or attendants on site, so prompted to pay by machine which didn't work for us. Left cash instead.

Tuesday May 24

Had a nice morning walk on the beach at Hvalnes Nature Reserve. Drove the coastal route to Egilsstaðir, and then on to Borgarfjörður Eystri, stopping off about midway at a solar-powered refrigerated vending machine in the middle of nowhere for a drink. The drive down to Borgarfjörður Eystri is very scenic, and the campsite in the village is quite well organized with a nice, warm kitchen hut and good facilities for cooking food. In the late afternoon, we visited the Atlantic Puffin colony about 5 km out of town.

Wednesday May 25

Walked the road to the trailhead for the Brúnavík Circle hike and hiked the path over the hills to Brúnavík, back through the valley and then back over the hills to the main road again. Decided we wanted to be closer to Lake Mývatn for tomorrow, so retraced our route to Egilsstaðir and continued on to camp at Skjöldófsstaðir. Pouring rain, so the little, warm kitchen cabin and hot showers were much appreciated. Free laundry too.

Thursday May 26

Early departure got us to the access road off the ring road to the west side of Dettifoss. Rainy walk around Dettifoss and nearby Selfoss. Back on the ring road, continued to the turnoff to Krafla not far before Reykjahlíð. Drove up to the parking area for Krafla, and had a look at the crater in the driving rain. Tried to walk around the lava fields at Hverir just off the ring road, but the wind, rain, and occasional snow drove us back to our campervan. The weather lessened a bit, and we spent some time walking around Hverfjall and Dimmuborgir before heading to camp. No campsites seemed to be open in Reykjahlíð, so we drove down the east

side of Lake Mývatn to Vogar Campground. Nice pizzas from their pizza oven provided a nice change of pace, but this was the only campsite that actually charges you for your vehicle. We had an after-dinner visit to the Mývatn Nature Baths for a wonderful hot soak to take the chill off as the temperature wasn't much above freezing.

Friday May 27

Our full day at Lake Mývatn started with a walk of about one hour or so at the Hofði Nature Preserve on the east side of the lake. The loop hike around the Skútustaðagígar pseudocraters was our next stop, where a pair of Pink-footed Geese was the highlight. We also had a couple of Horned Grebes in breeding plumage along a small creek which were quite impressive.

Travelling a bit further west, the road meets highway 1 (ring road), and a right turn here on to the ring road quickly brought us to the Laxá River. A little trail along the Laxá River proved a great spot for Harlequin Duck. We tried exploring the western part of Lake Mývatn further on by turning inland off the ring road. However, the dirt roads into the marshlands near the Sigurgeir Bird Museum were blocked off (presumably for protection during the breeding season), and the museum itself was closed, so we didn't spend much time in the area. We decided to push on from Lake Mývatn, and drove to Goðafoss for a visit to the waterfall before settling in for the night at Camping Hamrar in Akureyri.

Saturday May 28

We took highway 82 north along Eyjafjörður to the town of Árskógssandur where we caught the ferry over to Hrisey Island. There are a couple of hiking trails on Hrisey Island, and we walked the wonderful 5 km-long Red trail. The day was bright and sunny and we had a wonderful "birdy" walk on the island with great scenery of the fjord. We had a soothing soak in the hot pools at the Hrisey swimming pool (wonderful views over the fjord) before catching the ferry back.

We had plans to camp in Varmahlið, and with enough time, we decided to take the scenic route by driving up highway 82 along Eyjafjörður and down Skagafjörður along highway 76. The route passes through a couple of one-way tunnels where, unbeknownst to us at first, the northbound vehicles have to pull over to the side into some "wait areas" to allow the oncoming traffic to pass. After some initial confusion (and a tiny bit of panic), we got the idea of how the system worked. Camping Varmahlið was a very nice campsite with good facilities and actual trees!

Sunday May 29

A stop at the river and harbour at Blönduós proved worthwhile with our only sighting of Iceland Gull. Heading west, we stopped at the Erpsstaðir Creamery for some wonderful ice cream before reaching Eiríksstaðir where there is an interesting museum showcasing a reproduction of a Viking longhouse. Fortunately for us on this Sunday, there was a kind of festival, with many people dressed in period clothing. We continued our long drive to the Westfjords where we camped at the Flókalundur Campsite which has a wonderful view over Vatnsfjörður. The adjacent hotel has a nice restaurant. The campsite was comfortable, although the sheltered cabin did not have any cooking facilities. We had an afternoon soak at Hellulaug, a nice thermal bath within a short walk of the campsite.

Monday May 30

We had a long day planned, so we departed Flókalundur early. First up was a short walk along Barðastrandarsandur beach, and then a stop at the interesting and atmospheric BA 64, a ship that was beached in 1981 and the oldest steel ship in Iceland. We continued to Rauðisandur beach, a beautiful red-sand beach perfect for a walk. Backtracking our route, we made the drive out to the Látrabjarg bird cliffs, but I found the viewing opportunities here overrated. The campsite at Patreksfjörður was closed (many facilities in this part of Iceland do not open until at least June 1), so we continued to Tálknafjörður where the campsite was also officially closed, but we happened to meet the owner and she gave us permission to set up camp and use the facilities which was really nice. Later on, we headed out of town to the Pollurinn Hot Pool for a well-deserved hot soak.

Tuesday May 31

We drove to Bíldudalur, and took the scenic dirt road out of town for a view of the fjord. The weather turned a bit more severe, and by the time we got to Dynjandi, we endured a bit of light rain and wind on the walk to the waterfall. We had the ferry to Stykkishólmur to catch at 6 pm, but we had enough time for a wonderful soak in the Krosslaug hot spring not far from the ferry terminal. The hot spring is small, but we had it to ourselves and we enjoyed a wonderful view out over the beach at low tide. It was, in fact, our favourite hot spring. The 2.5 hour ferry ride was uneventful, and we camped at the campsite on the edge of Stykkishólmur near the golf course.

Wednesday June 1

An early-morning walk at Ségandisey Cliff at the harbour was our first stop for the day. Heading east, we drove the lava fields at Berserkjahraun. The road was fine for our vehicle, and we found a pair of juvenile White-tailed Eagles, our only sighting of the trip. A stop at Svöðufoss gave us a look at yet another waterfall. Skarðsvik Beach was a nice stop, and we walked out to the Svörtuloft Lighthouse, but from this point onwards on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula, we had the feeling we were going from one busy tourist site to the next busy tourist site. It must be overwhelming during summer. We next had a quick look at the crater rim of Saxhóll Crater and the black-sand beach at Djúpalóssandur before backtracking to Hellissandur Camping where we camped for the night.

Thursday June 2

Our first outing this morning was a tour of the Vatnshellir Cave, an 8000 year-old lava tube created by a volcanic eruption, with Summit Guides (www.summitguides.is). After the tour, we headed to the nearby Malarrif Lighthouse before driving to the village of Arnarstapi and walked the well-trodden path to the village of Hellnar where we had a very nice fish soup at the Fjöruhúsið Café. The coastal walk was very enjoyable and good for birds, but it certainly was busy. We retraced our steps back to Arnarstapi and drove to Buðir where we had some wonderful mint tea and chocolate cake at the charming Hotel Buðir. After prying ourselves away from the warmth and comfort of the Hotel Buðir, we drove on to Akranes and camped at the Akranes Campsite. This was our least favourite campsite as there was no inside common area, and at the time of our visit, it was bitterly cold. We tried washing clothes, but the washing machine wouldn't drain properly, leaving us with a pile of soaking, wet clothes that couldn't be put into the dryer.

Friday June 3

Another gloomy day weatherwise had us on the road to Gullfoss where we took in our last of the many waterfalls we visited in Iceland. A short drive away was Geysir where we enjoyed a good look at Strokkur erupting every 10 minutes or so. We then headed to Þingvellir National Park and toured the historic site, location of the Alþing, the general assembly, established around 930 AD. On to Reykjavik, we camped at the Reykjavik Campsite where they, strangely, would not accept payment in cash. We took advantage of the adjacent Laugardalslaug for our final experience in an Icelandic thermal pool. A nearby fish shop had some wonderful fresh arctic char which we cooked for supper.

Saturday June 4

Our last full day in Iceland was nice and sunny, and we enjoyed exploring downtown Reykjavik. A quick walk through Hólavallagarður, a central cemetery, failed to produce either Eurasian Wren or Goldcrest which have been reported from this site, one of the few places in Iceland with tree cover.

Sunday June 5

After checking out, we headed out of Reykjavik towards the airport, but first stopped off at the lighthouse at Garður for another attempt at seawatching. We had time to visit the worthwhile Viking World museum in Njardvik, the highlight being the full-size reproduction of a Viking ship which actually sailed in 2000 to New York to commemorate Leifur Eiriksson's voyage to the New World 1000 years prior. We had time for fish and chips at a local place in Njardvik before returning our campervan to Cheap Campervans and taking their shuttle to the airport where we took Icelandair 603 at 17⁰⁵ back to Toronto.

Birding Sites

One could potentially think of Iceland as being one big, individual birding site as birds are in evidence everywhere, but I will list a few locations that are particularly noteworthy or good for specific species of interest.

Lighthouse at Garður (gps: 64.082917, -22.693640)

Conveniently located near the airport, this is an excellent spot for seawatching. My particular targets here were Manx Shearwater and European Storm-Petrel which, unfortunately, I could not find, but it was nevertheless a good location for other seabirds and shorebirds. Of particular interest was a pair of Purple Sandpipers.

Ingólfshöfði (gps: 63.879197, -16.659162)

There is a road heading south from the ring road, starting at the above gps coordinates, that is excellent for Great Skua. We came across no fewer than 15 birds that appeared to be nesting in the area along this short stretch of road. At the end of the road is the jumping off point for the Ingólfshöfði Puffin Tour (www.puffintour.is), although we did not take the tour.

Hafnarhólmi (gps: 65.539810, -13.753874)

The gps co-ordinates above are for the parking lot for the puffin colony about 5 km beyond the village of Borgarfjörður Eystri. If Atlantic Puffins are on your list, this place offers far superior viewing opportunities to the more famous site at Látrabjarg cliffs. Aside from the puffins, we enjoyed up close views of nesting Black-legged Kittiwakes and Northern Fulmars. An afternoon visit seemed best for photographs.

Lake Mývatn

The lake is wonderful for waterfowl in particular, and anywhere along the road that circles the lake that offers a view is worth a stop. Of particular note is the Höfði Nature Preserve (parking lot at gps: 65.579703, -16.950467) which offers a nice walking trail around a marshy margin of the lake, good for an hour or two. At the southern end of the lake is Skútustaðagígar, an area of pseudocraters with a circular walk around a small lake. It was here, amongst the pseudocraters, that we found Pink-footed Goose, a pair that was resting quietly. Along the circular walk around the lake, we had several up-close Horned Grebes, beautiful birds in breeding plumage. There is a big parking lot at gps: 65.567500, -17.036008. Continuing west along highway 848, you reach the ring road (highway 1). Just at this junction is a small place to park. There is a path you can walk along the Laxá River, and the fast-flowing water here is excellent for Harlequin Duck.

Blönduós

I had read that Iceland Gull (rather rare on Iceland) was possible at Blönduós. Upon arrival in town, we took Húnabraut (the street to the right just before the bridge) and drove towards the small harbour. Once reaching the water's edge, we had an Iceland Gull around gps: 65.667765, -20.292489. We then drove back and parked near the bridge. There is a small park with a good view over the river, and there was nice activity at a small sandbar where we had another Iceland Gull and a pair of Red Knots.

Látrabjarg Bird Cliffs (gps: 65.502449, -24.529477)

The bird cliffs at Látrabjarg are not only famous for birds, but also represent the westernmost point in Europe. However, I found the site underwhelming. The pathway follows along the top of the cliffs and offers viewpoints looking downwards, but most of the birds are quite far away. A careful search produced only two puffins, only observed by getting down on our stomachs for safety, and

peeking over the edge. That said, it is a reliable site for Thick-billed Murre, and we counted about 25 birds. It was also interesting to see the Bridled form of Common Murre.

Hólavallagarður (gps: 64.144725, -21.947695)

You can enter this cemetery in central Reykjavik at several locations along its adjacent streets. It is a known location for Eurasian Wren and Goldcrest, although we missed both during our short visit. Eurasian Blackbird was quite common however.

Bird List

ANATIDAE (Ducks, Geese and Waterfowl)

Whooper Swan

Cygnus cygnus

Two pairs were first spotted as we drove back along the long dirt road from the Krísuvíkurberg cliffs on our first day in Iceland, May 19. Afterwards, we located Whooper Swans on all days of our trip except one. Very common birds.

Pink-footed Goose

Anser brachyrhynchus

A fantastic pair was resting on top of one of the pseudocraters at the Skutustaðagígar on the southern side of Lake Mývatn on May 27. We were tipped off to their presence by a tour leader guiding a small group of birders.

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

Three were in the grassy fields during a wonderful sunny hike above the falls at Skógafoss on the morning of May 21, and two more were seen while driving the ring road later in the day. Afterwards, birds were commonly seen on most days while driving the roads.

Barnacle Goose

Branta leucopsis

After visiting the Kvíárjökull glacier on May 23, we turned back on to the ring road heading east and quickly encountered a flock of 13 Barnacle Geese around a small pool adjacent to the road. Later in the day, a few were spotted at quite a distance in Höfn harbour.

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

A surprise was finding a Canada Goose as we entered the Melanes campsite at Rauðisandur Beach on May 30.

Eurasian Wigeon***Mareca penelope***

On May 24, we stopped at a small lighthouse along the road for a break and a stretch, and once we got back on the road, we found our first Eurasian Wigeon roadside. One male was in a marshy area along the road after we climbed out of Borgarfjörður Eystri on our way back to Egilsstaðir on May 25. A pair was found at Vogar Camping on May 26. Fairly common on Lake Mývatn. Birds were also seen while driving from Varmahlið campsite towards Flókalundur on May 29.

Gadwall***Mareca strepera***

A pair was scoped at a roadside viewpoint just south of the entrance to the Hofði Nature Preserve on the east side of Lake Mývatn on May 27.

Green-winged Teal***Anas crecca***

On May 28, we found single birds at roadside wetlands near tunnels on the drive north of Árskógssandur, followed by two pairs on the mudflats at Siglufjörður later in the day.

Mallard***Anas platyrhynchos***

Three were found around the campsite at Skaftafell National Park on May 21. Small numbers were found thereafter on most days as we drove around.

Northern Pintail***Anas acuta***

The roads were closed around the Sigurgeir Bird Museum, but as we stopped to have a snack and decide what to do next, two males came into view in a marshy area seen from a parking spot behind the museum on May 27. Two birds were at the mudflats at Siglufjörður on May 28.

Tufted Duck***Aythya fuligula***

The drive to Borgarfjörður Eystri passes through a flat, marshy area before climbing up and making the steep descent to town, and five birds were found in this marshy area on May 24. Four birds were seen in the same area on our return the next day. Numerous on Lake Mývatn on May 27. Thereafter, as we drove west, we found a couple of pairs on most days.

Greater Scaup***Aythya marila***

Six or seven pairs were seen on Lake Mývatn on May 27, a good place being the Hofði Nature Preserve.

Common Eider***Somateria mollissima***

Common everywhere along the coast, and first seen on our first visit to the lighthouse at Garður on May 19.

Harlequin Duck***Histrionicus histrionicus***

On May 24, we stopped at a small lighthouse along the road for a break and a stretch, and it was here we found our first Harlequin Duck, a male. Very common along the short trail along the Laxá River near the southwestern corner of Lake Mývatn on May 27. A male was spotted on Hrisey Island on May 28. Five birds were seen at the river mouth at the Dynjandi waterfall on May 31. Five more were found on our hike between Arnarstapi and Hellnar on June 2.

Long-tailed Duck***Clangula hyemalis***

A total of about eight birds were seen around Lake Mývatn on May 27. A pair was found at Blönduós on May 29. Three birds were found as we drove the roads on May 31. A pair was on a small lake on the drive around the lava fields at Berserkjakraun on June 1.

Common Scoter***Melanitta nigra***

Our only sighting was of a pair at a roadside viewpoint just south of the entrance to the Hofði Nature Preserve around Lake Mývatn on May 27.

Barrow's Goldeneye***Bucephala islandica***

Fairly common on Lake Mývatn on May 27.

Red-breasted Merganser***Mergus serrator***

On May 19, four birds flew by our position at the lighthouse at Garður, and several were at the Krísuvíkurberg cliffs later in the day. On May 21, two pairs were seen in flight at Reynisfjara Beach. A pair was found at Ingólfshöfði on May 23. Two pairs were seen on Lake Mývatn on May 27. A pair was spotted on Hrisey Island on May 28. On May 29, pairs were seen at Blönduós and Flókalundur.

PHASIANIDAE (Pheasants, Grouse and Allies)**Rock Ptarmigan*****Lagopus muta***

Great looks at several birds on our hike in Skaftafell National Park on May 22. On May 24, a roadside stop at a small lighthouse to stretch our legs and have a look at the view resulted in a sighting of Rock Ptarmigan with two birds being seen well, with another found in flight later in the day. Two birds flew over our campsite at Borgardfjörður Eystri on May 25. Birds were common and easy to see on Hrisey Island on May 28.

PODICIPEDIDAE (Grebes)

Horned Grebe

Podiceps auritus

On the loop trail around the Skútustaðagígar pseudocraters on May 27, we had up close looks at several spectacular males in a narrow channel. Several were seen later in the day on the western side of Lake Mývatn as well.

HAEMATOPODIDAE (Oystercatchers)

Eurasian Oystercatcher

Haematopus ostralegus

Quite common at seaside sites, and many seen while driving the roads as well.

CHARADRIIDAE (Plovers and Lapwings)

European Golden-Plover

Pluvialis apricaria

Quite common in the Gunnhver hot springs area on May 19 with more than ten birds observed. Five were seen at Ingólfshöfði on May 23. Two were found while driving the ring road on May 24. Several were flushed on the Brúnavík Circle hike near Borgardfjörður Eystri on May 25. Three birds were found at various stops around the western side of Lake Mývatn on May 27. One was spotted while driving the ring road on May 29.

Common Ringed Plover

Charadrius hiaticula

First seen at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19. One was found while driving the ring road on May 24. Several were along the river at Blönduós on May 29. Several were at the river mouth at the Dynjandi waterfall on May 31. A few were seen as we drove along the northern edge of the Snæfellsnes peninsula on June 1.

SCOLOPACIDAE (Sandpipers and Allies)

Common Snipe

Gallinago gallinago

Very common - seen daily.

Black-tailed Godwit

Limosa limosa

On the drive back from Borgardfjörður Eystri to Egilsstaðir on May 25, we had a total of four birds. Two were seen at Ólafsvík on June 1. The hike from Arnarstapi to Hellnar produced two more birds. Lastly, one very tame individual was approached very closely as we walked around the historical site at Pingvellir National Park on June 3.

Whimbrel***Numenius phaeopus***

First seen at the harbour at Vik with three or four birds found in the beach area on May 21. From May 24 onwards, birds were quite commonly encountered, virtually daily, with many actively calling birds.

Common Redshank***Tringa totanus***

One was at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19. On May 20, one was at the harbour at Vik, and another was seen while driving the ring road. On May 23, we found one at Ingólfshöfði and another in Höfn harbour. One was found as we walked from the campsite at Borgarfjörður Eystri to the trailhead of the Brúnavík Circle hike on May 25. Three birds were found at various stops around the western side of Lake Mývatn on May 27. Many sightings while driving the roads on May 28. Quite common in the Westfjords and on the Snæfellsnes peninsula.

Ruddy Turnstone***Arenaria interpres***

Common at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19. One was seen at Höfn harbour on May 23. At least 10 birds were at Hvalnes Beach on May 24. Four were found on Hrisey Island on May 28.

Red Knot***Calidris canutus***

A pair was along the river at Blönduós on May 29.

Sanderling***Calidris alba***

At least 20 birds were scurrying around the beach, displaying their typical feeding behaviour, at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19.

Dunlin***Calidris alpina***

One was seen at Höfn harbour on May 23. Around eight birds were observed on the mudflats at Siglufjörður on May 28. Several were on the river at Blönduós on May 29. Eight birds were at the river mouth at Dynjandi waterfall on May 31, and about 20 fed in the mud later in the day, sighted from the warmth of the serene Krosslaug hot spring, before catching the ferry to Stykkishólmur.

Purple Sandpiper***Calidris maritima***

Two were on the rocky beach at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19. One was at Hvalnes Beach on May 24.

Red-necked Phalarope***Phalaropus lobatus***

On the drive back from Borgarfjörður Eystri to Egilsstaðir on May 25, we found two birds in a roadside pond. Commonly seen around the western side of Lake Mývatn on May 27. Many sightings while driving the roads on both May 28 and 29. Rather common in the Westfjords and the northern part of the Snæfellsnes peninsula with several birds seen daily.

STERCORARIIDAE (Skuas and Jaegers)

Great Skua

Stercorarius skua

A decision to drive down the access road to the sea at Ingólfshöfði produced great sightings of 15 birds, several on nests, on May 23. We also found one at the Jökulsárlón bridge later the same day.

Parasitic Jaeger

Stercorarius parasiticus

Five birds were seen from our camping area at Skaftafell National Park after our arrival on May 21. Only one was seen in the park during our hike the next day. Three were found in the morning around our campsite at Stafafell on May 24, and we later saw several as we drove the ring road to Egilsstaðir. Two were found as we drove from Borgarfjörður Eystri back to Egilsstaðir on May 25. Nice looks at two birds on Hrisey Island on May 28. One was at Rauðisandur Beach on May 30. One flew over our campervan on June 2.

ALCIDAE (Auks, Murres and Puffins)

Common Murre

Uria aalge

At least 20 birds were at the Krísuvíkurberg cliffs on May 19. Very common at the Látrabjarg cliffs on May 30, including several of the "Bridled" variety. Very numerous at the cliffs beyond Skarðsvik Beach on June 1. Many sightings at various stops along the Snæfellsnes Peninsula on June 2.

Thick-billed Murre

Uria lomvia

About 25 birds were counted at the Látrabjarg cliffs on May 30. At least two were spotted at the cliffs beyond Skarðsvik Beach on June 1.

Razorbill

Alca torda

At least 10 birds were found at the Krísuvíkurberg cliffs on May 19. Common at the Látrabjarg cliffs on May 30. Fairly common at the cliffs beyond Skarðsvik Beach on June 1. Frequent sightings at various stops along the southern Snæfellsnes Peninsula on June 2.

Black Guillemot

Cephus grylle

A lone bird was observed at the Krísuvíkurberg cliffs on May 19. A roadside stop at a lighthouse produced four swimming in amongst the rocks below the cliffs on May 24, and we saw just one at the puffin colony near Borgarfjörður Eystri later in the afternoon. Around 15 birds were swimming within the small, sheltered harbour at Hrisey Island on May 28. Several were seen from the ferry to Stykkishólmur on May 31. A few were spotted on the northern Snæfellsnes peninsula on June 1. Several were seen at various stops along the southern Snæfellsnes Peninsula on June 2.

Atlantic Puffin

Fratercula arctica

Our first sighting was around ten birds in the water off the Reynisfjara Beach on May 21. A few were at the beach at Hvalnes Nature Park on May 24, and later in the day, we had wonderful close-up encounters at the breeding colony near Borgarfjörður Eystri. On the higher parts of the Brúnavík Circle loop hike on May 25, we could look back and see many puffins in the water at the colony where we were the day before. Surprisingly, only two were seen at Látrabjarg cliffs on May 30. Several were seen from the ferry to Stykkishólmur on May 31.

LARIDAE (Gulls, Terns and Skimmers)

Common Gull

Larus canus

First seen at the Krísuvíkurberg cliffs on May 19. A pair, as well as other scattered individuals, were seen on Hrisey Island on May 28.

Great Black-backed Gull

Larus marinus

About 10 birds were at the Garður lighthouse on May 19. Two at Reynisfjara Beach on May 21. One was seen while driving on May 24. Two were on Hrisey Island on May 28. A single bird at Blönduos on May 29. Three were seen while driving in the Westfjords on May 31. Common on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula including a few pairs with chicks. A few birds were seen on our day trip out to Geysir, Gullfoss and Þingvellir National Park on June 3.

Glaucous Gull

Larus hyperboreus

On May 19, we had many immatures at the Garður lighthouse, and two adults at the Krísuvíkurberg cliffs. We saw two at Jökulsárlon on May 23. Three birds were at Hvalnes Nature Reserve Beach on May 24.

Iceland Gull

Larus glaucoides

Two birds seen at Blönduos, one on the rocky breakwall and one at the mouth of the river on May 29.

Herring Gull

Larus argentatus

Small numbers at the Garður lighthouse on May 19. Two at Reynisfjara Beach on May 21. One at Höfn harbour on May 23. One was at the puffin colony at Borgarfjörður Eystri on May 24. Six birds were found as we hiked the Brúnavík Circle trail near Borgarfjörður Eystri on May 25. One was on Hrisey Island on May 28. Three at Blönduos on May 29. Several encountered daily while driving in the Westfjords. Fairly common on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. A few birds were seen on our day trip out to Geysir, Gullfoss and Þingvellir National Park on June 3.

Lesser Black-backed Gull***Larus fuscus***

Several were spotted roadside as we travelled from the airport to pick up our campervan on May 19. On May 23, we came across one individual along the road after leaving Kviarjökull, a few at Jökulsárlon and a few at Höfn harbour. On May 24, we came across birds at Hvalnes Nature Reserve Beach and while driving to Borgarfjörður Eystri. One was at Brúnavik Beach on May 25. A single bird at Blönduos on May 29. One in the Westfjords on May 31. Fairly common on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

Black-headed Gull***Chroicocephalus ridibundus***

Large numbers at Reynisfjara Beach on May 27. Common at Jökulsárlon on May 23. On May 24, we came across birds at Hvalnes Nature Reserve Beach and while driving to Borgarfjörður Eystri. About three birds were seen around Lake Mývatn on May 27. Fairly common on Hrisey Island and on the mudflats outside of Siglofjörður on May 28. Single birds at Blönduos and Flókalundur on May 29. Very common during our time in the Westfjords. Common on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. A few birds were seen on our day trip out to Geysir, Gullfoss and Pingvellir National Park on June 3.

Black-legged Kittiwake***Rissa tridactyla***

Numerous at the Krísuvíkurborg cliffs on May 19. Common at the puffin colony at Borgarfjörður Eystri on May 24. Numerous on the river just outside Borgarfjörður Eystri on May 25. Just one or two birds on Hrisey Island on May 28. Numerous at the Látrabjarg cliffs on May 30. Several were seen while driving in the Westfjords on May 31. Common on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

Arctic Tern***Sterna paradisaea***

Extremely common on Iceland.

GAVIIDAE (Loons)**Red-throated Loon*****Gavia stellata***

On May 23, we saw quite a few, including several quite close, on the lagoon at Kviarjökull glacier, as well as a few in Höfn harbour. On May 24, we saw one in a roadside wetland as we drove towards Borgarfjörður Eystri. One was seen roadside near the Skútustaðagígar pseudocraters on May 27. One was on Hrisey Island on May 28. Two birds were seen well at Blönduos on May 29. A final two birds were found at Pingvellir National Park on June 3.

Common Loon***Gavia immer***

Our first bird was swimming off of Hvalnes Nature Reserve beach on May 24. On May 27, we spotted one in the Hofði Nature Preserve and another on the lake at the Skútustaðagígar pseudocraters. One was found while driving the roads in the Westfjords on May 30.

PROCELLARIIDAE (Shearwaters and Petrels)**Northern Fulmar*****Fulmarus glacialis***

Very common at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19, as well as at the Krísuvíkurborg cliffs. Common at Seljalandsfoss on May 20. Numerous at Skógafoss and elsewhere on May 21. Common at Hvalnes Nature Reserve beach on May 24, and at spots along the coast later in the day, including at the puffin colony at Borgarfjörður Eystri. Common on Hrisey Island on May 28. About 12 birds were at Blönduos on May 29. Common in the Westfjords from May 30-31, especially at the Látrabjarg bird cliffs. Common on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula from June 1-2 as well.

SULIDAE (Boobies and Gannets)**Northern Gannet*****Morus bassanus***

Two were seen in flight at a distance at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19. Two more were spotted in flight at Hvalnes Nature Reserve beach on May 24.

PHALACROCORACIDAE (Cormorants and Shags)**Great Cormorant*****Phalacrocorax carbo***

Four were seen in flight at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19. Two were spotted around Hrisey Island on May 28. A pair was at Skarðsvik Beach on June 1.

European Shag***Gulosus aristotelis***

Four birds were actively fishing just off Skarðsvik Beach on June 1. About 20 birds were seen on our hike from Arnarstapi to Hellnar and back on June 2.

ACCIPITRIDAE (Hawks, Eagles and Kites)**White-tailed Eagle*****Haliaeetus albicilla***

A juvenile was conveniently perched as we drove the road through the Berserkjahraun lava fields on June 1. While we were watching it, another juvenile flew in briefly, before they both flew off together.

FALCONIDAE (Falcons and Caracaras)

Merlin

Falco columbarius

A good but brief look at one bird in flight on our Brúnavik Circle hike on May 25. One more was seen on the road through the Berserkjahraun lava fields on June 1.

CORVIDAE (Crows, Jays and Magpies)

Common Raven

Corvus corax

One was spotted in transit on May 19. Another was seen during our superjeep day trip into Þorsmörk on May 20. One was observed around the Fjallsárlon lagoon on May 23. Several were seen while driving on May 24. Four were found during our Brúnavik Circle hike on May 25. Two birds were around Lake Mývatn on May 27. One was on Hrisey Island on May 28. Scattered sightings as we drove to Flókalundur on May 29. Common in the Westfjords from May 30-31 and on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula from June 1-2.

HIRUNDINIDAE (Swallows)

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

A few were spotted at the lighthouse at Garður on May 19.

STURNIDAE (Starlings)

European Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

A few individuals were observed at scattered locations as we drove from the airport area to our campsite on day 1, May 19. One was on Hrisey Island on May 28.

TURDIDAE (Thrushes)

Eurasian Blackbird

Turdus merula

A brief glimpse a bird in flight that sure seemed to be a member of this species in Egílsstaðir on May 25. A pair was at our Reykjavik campsite on June 3, and we saw them there on June 4, as well as at the old cemetery (Hólavallagarður).

Redwing***Turdus iliacus***

Common during our superjeep day trip into Þorsmörk on May 20. On May 21, we had two at Skógafoss and another at Skaftafell. Commonly seen during our hike in Skaftafell National Park on May 22. Three were seen on the walk from our campsite to the trailhead for the Brúnavík Circle hike on May 25. A few were around the campground at Skjöldófsstaðir in the morning and while we walked around Dimmuborgir in the afternoon. Common at various stops around Lake Mývatn on May 27. Common on Hrisey Island on May 28. Scattered sightings as we drove to Flókalundur on May 29. Common in the Westfjords from May 30-31, with a few on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula on June 2. A final three birds were observed at Þingvellir National Park on June 3.

MUSCICAPIDAE (Old World Flycatchers)**Northern Wheatear*****Oenanthe oenanthe***

On May 25, we had a very good look at one bird as we walked from our campsite to the trailhead for the Brúnavík Circle hike, and we had one more on the hike itself. One was found at the Malarrif lighthouse on June 2.

MOTACILLIDAE (Wagtails and Pipits)**Meadow Pipit*****Anthus pratensis***

First seen at the Gunnhver hot springs on May 19. One was displaying in the morning at our campsite in Hvolsvöllur on May 20. Two birds were at Skógafoss on May 21. Many were displaying during our hike in Skaftafell National Park on May 22. Four birds were found as we walked the trail around the Skútustaðagígar pseudocraters on May 27. Five birds were on Hrisey Island on May 28. Scattered sightings as we drove to Flókalundur on May 29. Common in the Westfjords from May 30-31 and on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula from June 1-2. One was seen on our day trip on June 3.

White Wagtail***Motacilla alba***

On May 19, we had one at the lighthouse at Garður, and one at our campsite at Hvolsvöllur. On May 21, we saw one at Skógafoss and another at Vík. Four birds were seen on May 22, mainly at our campsite in Skaftafell National Park. Two were spotted around the Fjallsárlon lagoon on May 23. On May 24, there were two around our campsite at Stafafell, and two at the puffin colony at Borgarfjörður Eystri. Two were spotted on May 25 as we walked to the trailhead for the Brúnavík Circle hike. One was spotted in transit on May 26. Three birds were found at various stops around Lake Mývatn on

May 27. Several were on Hrisey Island on May 28. Scattered sightings as we drove to Flókalundur on May 29. Common in the Westfjords from May 30-31 and on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula from June 1-2. Two were seen on our day trip on June 3.

FRINGILLIADE (Finches, Euphonias and Allies)

Common Redpoll

Acanthis flammea

Two flocks were spotted as we walked the trail at the Hofði Nature Preserve on May 27. One small flock was on Hrisey Island on May 28.

CALCARIIDAE (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

Snow Bunting

Plectrophenax nivalis

Our only sighting was of a single bird at Jökulsárlon on May 23.

Mammal List

Harbour Seal

Phoca vitulina

On May 23, we spotted three at the lagoon at Fjallsárlon and many along the river mouth at Jökulsárlon. About four were found at the junction of highways 612 and 614 in the Westfjords on May 30.