Norway / Svalbard – in the Realm of the Polar Bear (8th-21st July 2013)

We had wanted to see polar bears for many years but were torn between trying to see them in the wild of the Arctic, or just going to Churchill, Canada in October/November and almost certainly see them around the town while waiting for the pack ice to form.

I had always favoured seeing them swimming, hunting and acting in a natural way but Sarah after some pretty bad sea-sickness in Antarctica and around New Zealand was reluctant to spend much time at sea which would usually be required for this approach. However at last year’s Birdfair we attended a talk where the cruise around Svalbard was presented and Sarah saw that it didn’t really require much time in open water and rough seas as most of the sailing was close to land, so she said “let’s do it”. However even last August the Naturetrek trip we fancied had no decent cabins left, so we looked for a trip that tried to go around the archipelago on a smallish ship, as that we thought guaranteed getting into the pack ice and therefore offered a better chance of bears at work and play. So it was we booked with Gadventures (booking nearly a year in advance got us a 15% discount and a cabin upgrade on 4th Deck with Picture window).

Agenda was

Fly from Manchester to Oslo with SAS on 8th July – 7 hours waiting time so some birding near Oslo airport. Then continue flight late evening to Longyearbyen.

Overnight at Radisson Blue Longyearbyen then day exploring Longyearbyen area

July 9th board ship 16.30

July 9th – 19th – circumnavigate Svalbard (depending on ice and weather) in an anticlockwise direction stopping at various wildlife and scenic spots

July 19th – morning in Longyearbyen for last bit of birding, then fly back to Oslo PM

July 19th-20th Oslo (staying at Comfort Inn Borsparken), day for birding / site seeing

21st July fly back to Manchester with SAS

Day 1 – On arrival in Oslo airport after mid-day, luggage checked through to Longyearbyen (note not all flights do this as you have to clear customs in Oslo if the Longyearbyen flight is touching down at Tromso). We asked the information desk whether there were any parks or wildlife areas within a 30 minute bus ride of the airport, we didn’t want to go into Oslo at this point. The helpful girl was able to tell us about an area at Morepenn which was surrounded by woods and fields. We then went to the public transport stand and found out the bus number and the stand to get there. We had 20 minutes until the bus was due so we bought some provisions and headed off.

At the bus stop we had our first birds Jackdaw, House Sparrow and Feral Pigeon.

The bus ride took us past lots of airport car parks and round the other side of the airport before heading north into the country side. There was lots of forest around the area so it looked hopeful. We were just off the bus, fortunately with our bins around our necks
when two birds flew up from near the dust-bins, they were Nutcrackers – I couldn’t believe that these birds which we had never seen before and which I believe are usual secretive were so openly viewed. We enjoyed them for a bit but without access to the camera etc. which were still in the camera pack, so didn’t manage any photos – (do any locals know if these are usual round here – or just failed breeders / youngsters on the move?).

We then looked around the area; some fields, benches in an open area (an old football field) and then some woods with tracks into and a path alongside the road in both directions. We sat down at the benches and could see a couple of Spotted Flycatchers, a Pied Wagtail, at least 10 Fieldfares, 2 yellowhammers and a blackbird, while we had lunch. After lunch we headed down the tracks into the woods, first up were some Great Tits, Willow Warbler, Garden Warbler and Chiffchaff, then Mistle Thrush, Redwing and more Fieldfare, then when I was trying to photograph a Yellowhammer, Sarah spotted a Woodpecker which she said had some yellow on it (I only saw distant flight views), I assume it was Three-toed but didn’t count it as Sarah wasn’t 100% and I didn’t really see any more than a woodpecker shape.

As the afternoon wore on we managed to add a nice Rosefinch, some Blue tits, a Buzzard, Chaffinch and a lovely male Bullfinch. Flying around the field were many Swallows and Swifts and finally a Kestrel.

After 18.00 buses back to the airport went from 2 an hour to hourly, so we headed back to the airport, with plenty of time to clear security, we needn’t have hurried as the flight was delayed an hour. So it was after mid-night when we arrived in Longyearbyen, but the sun was still shining brightly and it was a pleasant 5 degrees.

We did get two birds on the trip to the hotel, Arctic Tern and Glaucous Gull.

Longyearbyen, Svalbard / Norway	 Tuesday, 09 July 2013

We started our Arctic Adventure with a day exploring Longyearbyen, strolling along the main road and walking up past the reservoir and the husky dog stations. There was also a very well appointed bird hide in the harbor with some details of recent sightings which we visited.

Longyearbyen was founded as a coal mining city by the American businessman JM Longyear. Today the capital of Svalbard is a fairly vibrant community with most amenities of modern life, 2500 of the 3500 permanent population live here and it doesn’t look or feel like an unspoiled wilderness. But just outside of town civilization ends and we enter “Polar Bear Territory” (see the sign just before the reservoir) and strictly speaking you aren’t meant to walk any further
without being armed or accompanied by an armed guide as bears do come into the vicinity.

The bird life was pretty visible but variety was limited. First up were Arctic Terns, almost everywhere along the road and ready to attack if you strayed too far from the centre of the paved surface. Then we saw an Arctic Skua attacking some people on the right side of the road, closer inspection (though not too close) showed that there was actually a pair of birds with a single very downy chick.

Waders were on the pools by the side of the road, most were Purple Sandpipers with various rings, but we did get a few Dunlin, a Pectoral Sandpiper and a Ringed Plover.

By the dog kennels were 100+ common eider and around 60 Barnacle Geese, both with young. We did see a some drake eiders but despite some sightings by others of King Eider we couldn’t get one on this first day, nor could we find a Red(grey) Phalarope or Ivory Gull despite both being seen in the area over the last few days. We did get a very smart male Long-tailed Duck and later a female albeit they were quite distant on the reservoir. Snow Bunting were everywhere.

Glaucous Gulls were common and when perched anywhere near the terns, were under constant Arial bombardment, fun to watch.

At 16:00 it was time for us to get to the meeting point at the Radisson and at 16.15 time for us to make our way to the harbour to join our ship the MS Expedition. In all there were a 103 passengers roughly what we expected. We were welcomed aboard by the expedition staff members and a smiling ship team, who helped us check-in and settle into our cabins, our bags were waiting for us at the cabin door and cabin stewards showed us the features of our cabins.

We then had a few minutes to explore the ship before gathering in the Discovery Lounge for a briefing followed by the mandatory lifeboat drill out on deck. At around 6 o’clock we set sail and before and after dinner we enjoyed the spectacular scenery of Isfjorden and the sight of Fulmars accompanying for what was to be pretty much the full trip
Hornsund, Wednesday, 10 July 2013

A bright and sunny morning dawned as we cruised Hornsund, named by the English whaler Jonas Poole in 1610 after he was given a magnificent set of deer antlers. It enjoys some great scenery not least its many calving glacier fronts which seemed to be visible from all angles.

During a lecture on the wildlife of the area we had an announcement from the bridge that a bear had been sighted swimming in the water. The Lounge promptly emptied and everybody poured out on deck, fortunately we were on the 4th deck only a few steps from the lounge and the open deck so we were quickly on deck with camera and binoculars, some people on other decks just went out without their gear at first. The bear was just ahead of the ship about 150 yards away. We were able to see him swimming in the water for around 20 minutes before he reached land and he then covered a significant distance stopping on some nice snow and ice before re-entering the water and disappearing.

The onboard expert concluded it was a large male bear maybe as much as 1300 lbs. in weight, thirteen feet in length and maybe twelve or thirteen years old. It was clearly a very powerful animal and a great sighting for our very full first day. (See below a few photos of our first Polar Bear). This was a great relief as although sighting were a little distant in the sea and on land, it was in the bag now and worries of spending 11 days of unsuccessful bear searching were gone.

We had spoken to some people who had done the previous MS Expedition trip (7 nights only) and they had seen only one bear, so we had matched that.
In the afternoon it proved impossible to land in Hornsund due to the presence of a supply vessel for the Polish Research Station and the Governor’s ship, undertaking an investigation into a bear killing, there are only two moorings, so we were disappointed that we would not get to the Little Auk colony to see the many thousands of birds and possibility of Arctic Fox, still there would be other opportunities we hoped.

At least we could see many Little Auks flying around along with Fulmar, Puffin and Kittiwake. Instead of landing we set sail for the open sea and the Continental Shelf in search of sea mammals. Conditions were choppy and not entirely suitable for Cetacean watching and this wasn’t what Sarah signed up for, nevertheless her sea sickness patches worked and I spotted two Humpback Whales, unfortunately we were only able to get 4 other people on the displaying whales as everyone else was at the bow of the ship while we were watching from a sheltered spot on the stern, we did tell a crew member but as the whales weren’t following us they decided not to go back to relocate them.

Then I think pretty much all the passengers on deck (Bow and Stern) were rewarded with sightings of a pod of the relatively rare White-beaked Dolphin.

Sundneset & Diskobukta   Thursday, 11 July 2013

No landing early morning due to high winds, and a lack of walrus ashore meant a zodiac trip wouldn’t be productive, so planned landing at Kapp Lee was bypassed. Instead, we cruised over to Sundneset on Barentsøya Island, where everyone was able to get off the ship for the first time in a couple of days. While we were waiting for our deck to be called to the Mud Room to board the zodiacs, we saw our
first King Eiders, there was three amongst a group of 12 common eiders in flight. We also saw a few on the water from the zodiac as we sailed ashore. While there was not a plethora of wildlife ashore, there was plenty of interesting flora indeed some people said, the tundra was ablaze with color due to the recent bloom of high Arctic flowers, perhaps a bit of an overstatement but not as devoid of life as might be expected of the high arctic.

Over the stream in an area of mud just above the permafrost we could see some reindeer and then a pair of Ptarmigan. Unfortunately we couldn’t get close as the mud was like a sort of quicksand and people in previous years had been stuck here.

The afternoon saw us visit Diskobukta in the afternoon. This site is known for a dramatic canyon that forms a background for a very large Kittiwake colony. The area was bisected by a river which with a bit of care we were able to cross and the more mobile amongst us got very close to the cliff where an Arctic Fox was resting. The canyon walls were literally covered with nesting kittiwakes I estimated around 80,000 but who knows the real number, with just the odd glaucous gull towards the edges of the cliffs.

The cacophony created by thousands of calling seabirds in the enclosed canyon, along with the smell of guano was close to providing sensory overload.

Most of the birds were still incubating or tending recently hatched chicks and the number of broken eggs and bones suggested that the Arctic Foxes were being reasonable successful. There were at least three foxes present all of them without the lovely winter coat that you usually see in photographs, instead they looked rather scruffy with just a smattering of white about them.

Other birds seen included Snow Bunting, Pink-footed Goose, Red Throated Diver and Black Guillemot.

Negribreen, Heleysundet & Ormholet -12 July 13
We awoke to much brighter weather and a mild temperature of 6˚C, the blue skies and sunshine certainly made the impressive Negribreen shine. On the North end of Storfjord, this glacier resembles an ice shelf. While it appears to float, it is actually resting on ground which sits below sea level.

As the ship took us closer there were huge numbers of Kittiwakes and Fulmars both on the water and on the ice near the glacier face. As we got within about 300M there was a massive calving which sent substantial waves towards the ship, but we need not have worried (actually I don’t think anyone else did as they carried on taking photos or video while the wave approached us, and all we got was a gentle shaking.

The plan for the afternoon was to go ashore on one of the islands in the Heleysundet Channel, however when the scouts were out they found a bear swimming across the channel and he disappeared onto the Island. Norwegian laws bans you from going ashore when there is a bear in the vicinity and if you encounter a bear you have to leave as quickly as you can. The expedition leader summed up the dilemma, if people are in danger then they will try to scare off the bear, first with flares but ultimately they may have to shoot the bear which obviously no one wants. In any event it would actually be less paperwork to shoot the passenger rather than the bear, so we wouldn’t be going ashore. However the scouts reported back that we could go out in zodiacs or stay with the ship while it sailed through Heleysundet, an extremely narrow and difficult channel to navigate, our zodiacs would go through an even narrower passage Ormholet (worm hole). We went for the zodiac option

We were in for a real treat as not many expedition ships dare to venture to these channels and bays and even the most experienced staff were unsure of what we might encounter. We were greeted by feeding Kittiwakes, taking full advantage of strong currents and the nutrients they can provide and parking themselves on icebergs and bergy bits. I then spotted 3 Red Phalarope just before the entrance to the channel. As we sailed through the rippling tide we were rewarded with spectacular views of columnar basaltic rock cliffs resembling Lego blocks. Barnacle Geese, Glaucous Gulls and Black Guillemots were present as we eased our way through this very
narrow channel on our way back to *M/S Expedition*.

Later that night we arrived at Torellneset and anchored up overnight. From the deck we could see that there were at least a dozen Walrus ashore. I couldn’t resist regular watched to see that they were still there.

**Torellneset & Bråsvellbreen**  
Saturday, 13 July 2013

In our guide book it said this island would be almost entirely covered in ice making it rather inhospitable due to the polar influence of the Barents Sea. In fact it was 12 degrees and quite sunny with just a cool breeze making it feel like about 6 or 7%. Fortunately the wind was OK for zodiacs and there were no bears seen within the perimeter, so after breakfast we went ashore by Zodiac, where 12 walrus were still waiting for us. We landed south of the walrus haul-out so as not to disturb them, and walked along the pebble and sand beach.

The expedition guides roped of an area about 30 yards from the walrus, where we could view them without disturbing them. This was a group of about 12 males or 13 males it was difficult to actually count the tusks whatever the angle of viewing.

After viewing the walrus, a perimeter was set up so that we could walk freely about the area. The two off us decided to walk round the opposite route from everyone else but on speaking to other birders afterwards we didn’t see or miss anything different. For us birds viewable from the pebbles either on the pools or just off the beach were Kittiwakes, Fulmars,
Brünich’s Guillemots, Snow Buntings, Purple Sandpipers and Arctic Terns. An Arctic Skua pestered a Kittiwake until it dropped its prey at sea and we saw our first Long-tailed Skua of the trip, before heading back to the beach.

After returning to the ship, we moved on to Bråsvellbreen, which at 170 kilometers across and 250K deep is the biggest glacier front in the Northern Hemisphere. From the ship we watched the almost pristine ice front, which went on seemingly forever, revealing stunning waterfalls every few hundred meters and some calving though not as spectacular as yesterday.

On the desk I was doing some sea-watching, I got us on a fairly distant Sabine Gull and then when an Ivory Gull flew really close tried to get Sarah on it and get some shots at the same time, unfortunately I managed to fall down a few stairs and managed to cut my hand on the non-slip deck surface, just lots of lacerations and a bruise so a bit of blood and bashed knee and embarrassment was all I suffered but I did break the lens hood which luckily took most of the force, so no damage to camera or Sigma 150-500 lens. I left the 7D and big lens in the cabin for the afternoon until I could tape up the hood with some gaffer tape (bought this in Longyearbyen when my tripod fell apart – another story).

An hour or so later after some use of the first-aid kit, we went for a Zodiac cruise through the glacier ice, where even with the 50D and a short lens I got a few decent seal shots. We saw bearded and ringed seals.

When we got back on deck after the cruise we sat at the stern of the ship having Ice-cream and watching the ice go by, when another Ivory Gull came right up to the ship, we both enjoyed the bird and pointed it out to a few other passengers but believe it or not I didn’t photograph it, one of our fellow birders John did get a good flight shot but I never did get a shot and other birds we saw later were fairly distant.

Kvitøya Sunday, 14th July 2013

How the weather can change. When we went to bed we were near the shore and on pretty calm seas bathed in sunshine, but during the night we could feel the wind rising and a glance out the window showed no ice and pretty big waves.

At breakfast we anchored off Kvitøya (White Island), the easternmost and remotest island in the Svalbard archipelago, here we were closer to Russia than
Norway. Kvitoya is a bleak low island covered in snow and ice with just one small barren rocky peninsula at the western end. We were told bears often get marooned here when the ice retreats and the bridge spotted at least one bear on the shore. So no landings but the crew judged conditions OK for a Zodiac cruise but it was quite a challenge with the swell and wind and a huge contrast with the calm and sunny conditions of the last few days.

We were second zodiac out today. Close to shore there was the chance to see two perhaps three Polar Bears, one sitting close to the shore, which despite the waves I got one just about one recognisable shot of, and two wandering around although I only saw one of these two and Sarah and a few others on board didn’t manage to see either of the walking bears, in fact we had to get Scobie to take us around again just so everyone could see the most obvious bear such was the movement of the zodiac. Sarah didn’t enjoy her drenching when a couple of huge waves hit us, one completely flooded her parka pocket and killed her little point and click camera. Through a combination of a Rain sleeve and pack I managed to just about keep my camera with taped up hood dry Still she wasn’t ill unlike our friend Lorna who unfortunately spend the trip leaning over the side hanging on for dear life while being sick with only a glance up to see a bear and some walrus.

The highlight was the large numbers of Walrus in the water, with compact curious groups at the surface peering at the Zodiatics, including females and younger animals. Some came quite close.

It was great to get back to the comfort of the ship. Back on the ship the wind picked up to gale force and a planned landing in Storoya was quickly abandoned. We were then told “that we needed to make quick time towards Sjuoyane or we were likely to be completely cut off by pack ice coming from the North”. Fortunately the wind died a little over the next few hours but there was a surprisingly light complement for dinner (no Sarah, queasy but not sick – the patches do work) and quite a few people missing a game of ‘Arctic Bluff’ in the Discovery Lounge after dinner.

Most of us were returning to our cabins for the night as we came into the first areas of loose pack ice and as the wind dropped.

Then a bear was spotted, and Sue called it from the bridge. I didn’t have to ask Sarah twice if she
was getting up, she had thrown on her clothes in minutes (I wish she could dress that quickly at home) and we were out on deck within 5 minutes where we spent an hour, until around midnight, with the bear as it ambled along over the pack ice in the gently rolling swell, leaping between ice floes with ease, smashed through some ice as though in a mock seal hunt (we didn’t see any seals so we assume it was mock).

Sometimes it came closer and checked us out, see how close in the photo.

And when it got into the water it did so once in a very subtle way by carefully going in backwards!

What a way to end a very mixed day!
One last bear before Bed

When we got back to the cabin we had a look at some photos and video before deciding to retire for the night. We did think about staying up as we sailed slowly towards the thicker ice but decided that we would just get up nice and early in the morning and get out on deck in hopefully better light.

Once we had undressed and got ourselves ready for bed I had a feeling that I had to have one last look out the cabin window, and so it was at half past midnight we had our very own cabin bear. We looked at him to see if we could see the same scar tissue around the eye as the bear that had left us to the other side of the ship 30 minutes ago but it didn’t look like the same bear.

We wondered whether we should go to the bridge to announce the bear but Sarah rightly pointed out that anyone still up was probably watching it, as it was pretty obvious, while this bear was already being left behind so by the time people were roused it may have been distant anyway.
How lovely - awakening to a snowy arctic morning with just a light dusting of snow on the decks and with the bow of the ship nosed into pack ice, there were plenty of Kittiwakes, Glaucous Gulls, Black & Brunich’s Guillemots and Fulmar around us in the ice.

Today we were close to Sjuøyane, (translating to “Seven Islands”), a small archipelago North of Nordaustlandet. The main feature for the next 14 hours or so pack ice, often at up to 80-90% density and what often accompanies pack ice? Polar bears we hoped. We also hoped for Beluga Whales and Seals – well two out of three wasn’t bad. We had our first bear on the port side, about 500m away pretty early on, there were also quite a few Ringed Seals although getting a photograph was not so easy.

By lunch time we had seen two more bears one on each side of the ship but unfortunately each was probably about 1KM away and the ship had to just follow the leads in the ice so would only see the bear closely if he chose to be curious like those last night. Over the next few hours there was always at least one bear visible through bins or a scope. In the afternoon we got our first group of Harp Seals and then lots of others got an Ivory Gull which I somehow missed.

However it wasn’t until we nearly reached the edge of the thicker ice that we could see bears any closer, there were two about 500M away on the starboard side and another about 750M on the port side and fortunately one nice rotund bear was pleased to investigate the ship, allowing us to observe the grace and ease with which he navigated his domain

It was a day for feeling the remote silence long periods were spent just enjoying the movement of bears on pack ice and glimpsing a bit of their solitary lives, ever in search of seals.

Our most northerly point was reached today, 80˚40’ before heading South toward our night of travel in a foggy Hinlopenstretet.
One last photo from the pack ice which we finally left after 20 hours or so.

Kinnvika 16th July

We awoke to a damp, misty morning in Murchison fjord, an inlet at the top of Hinlopenstretet. Our destination the former research station of Kinnvika. Ongoing ashore we found find a well maintained collection of wooden huts housing aged scientific equipment, a sauna, workshops and meeting rooms served by old central heating.

On walking within the perimeter we found an Arctic Fox, hunkering down out the wind, before he walked right by our feet and a small family of reindeer the young one and the female still in their partial white fur.

Birds included Snow Bunting, Common Eider, Puffin, Barnacle Goose and Arctic Skua.

After lunch the word came from the bridge that there were two humpback whales in sight. The whales were slapping the water and feeding relatively close to our ship and provided an excellent sighting, while
still on desk we also saw two very large Fin Whales, and a Minke Whale and as we approach Alkerfjelet we started to see hundreds of Brunich’s Guillemot.

At Alkefjellet (tr. Guillemot Mountain) where we took a Zodiac Cruise to get close to the tens of thousands of birds, mainly Brünnich’s Guillemots, nesting, feeding and diving all around the towering cliffs. In amongst the Guillemots was the occasional Glaucous Gull, and I’m pretty sure an Iceland Gull which I pointed out to a few people, it was certainly shorter and smaller headed and I think breeding so a rarity if I’m right but photos that John and took were inconclusive on eye and bill pattern largely due to lots of movement in the zodiac.

Smeerenburgfjord & Magdalenefjord  Wednesday, 17 July 2013

We awoke to overcast conditions and a strong wind that was at least 30 knots. Our planned Zodiac trip for Little Auks was not to be in such conditions. So we continued on our way, sailing down Smeerenburgfjord heading for our next destination Magdalenefjord. This is the second most visited place in Svalbard after Longyearbyen despite its relative remoteness. It is easy to see the attraction as we enter the picture postcard scene just after 9am. Fortunately it is almost completely calm in the fjord and deserted so we can get to a little auk colony (at last).

Large numbers of guillemots, gulls and terns are nesting on the rocky slopes and beaches of the fjord and we soon spot the thousands of dovekies as we approach the steep slopes. It is not possible to get out and walk on this side of the fjord but Guy did let me step out on to a large rock at the water’s edge to at least allow me to get a few steady shots of the little auks, after that it was just a case of enjoying the huge number of birds coming and going.
After lunch we landed on the beach at Gravneset, an old whaler’s site, where men reduced the animals’ blubber to oil. Darkened patches and circles are all that remain today of the blubber ovens that were used. 100+ graves are on the low hummock just behind the beach and the area is now cordoned off to protect the gravesites, although the breeding arctic terns do a good job in keeping you away from the roped off area.

The weather this afternoon was near perfect and some passengers went for a polar plunge. We decided to go for a walk into the hills and found breeding Common Eider, Puffin, Arctic Skua and loads of Snow Bunting in family groupings.

In late afternoon /early evening the Captain brought the ship right up to the face of the Waggonwaybreen glacier for closer viewing of the ice and dinner was a barbecue on deck! A very nice way to end the day which started a little disappointingly, watching Kittiwakes and Fulmars on Ice with the toing and froing of Black Guillemots and Little Auks on to the hills.

Alkhornet & Sveabreen       - Thursday, 18 July 2013

The final full day of our voyage started under blue skies and an unseasonably warm temperature, with a really weird mist along the far side of the Isfjord. From the deck we were able to see a flock of eider with two King Eider amongst them albeit they were distant and heading towards eclipse plumage, we also saw Pink Foot and Barnacle Geese from the ship. The morning excursion took us to Alkhornet, a scenic mountain on the northern side of Isfjord. A noisy Kittiwake and Brünnich’s Guillemots bird cliff set the stage for a nice walk through the
rich tundra.

We were entertained by nice reindeer herd, an Arctic fox and a pair of aggressive, dive-bombing Arctic Skuas who when not attacking passengers dive bombed the reindeer.

The final afternoon was a Zodiac cruise along the impressive Sveabreen glacier. Nearly 2 miles across the face, we viewed a number of significant calvings, one of which almost got some Kayakers. Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes resting on small bergy bits and a swimming Bearded Seal provided photographic opportunities as we soaked up the sun.

One last zodiac ride across to Longyearbyen early on Friday 19th as the ship had to give up the dock to another cruise ship. Still it was all done very efficiently without anyone getting wet, good job as this was the first zodiac ride without wellingtons and waterproof trousers.

20 minutes later we had dropped off our luggage at the Radisson SAS and donated our bright red parkas to a Greenland charity run by Gadventures, (who knows in a few years’ time we might see two Explorer Antarctica coats being worn by locals in Greenland) but for us two trips was enough wear for us.

Plan was to spend 4 or 5 hours doing last walk around Longyearbyen before catching our flight to Oslo midafternoon.

Birds seen were pretty similar to first time hear, we had the still cranky Arctic Terns and Arctic Skuas both attacking anything in the vicinity, the loads of eiders and Barnacle Geese with chicks including one White (leucostic goose), Glaucous Gulls, Purple Sandpipers, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and a new one for the trip Grey
Plover. Snow Buntings were also still numerous.

The plane journey was not uneventful with a guy fainting in the aisle and hitting his head on the drinks trolley where he seemed to hang for a second or two and I just about managed to catch him and help him gently into the aisle and a recovery position, fortunately some medical personal were on the flight and they established that it was probably a diabetic faint and after some chocolate and drinks he was able to get off the plane at Tromso, clear customs with the rest of us then continue with no major ill effects to Oslo.

Getting train into Sentral Station was easy once we realized S was for Central not South at the auto ticket booth; we went for cheaper option of normal train which takes about 5 minutes longer than Flytoget but is closer to the exit we wanted for our hotel, which we found without any hiccups despite me forgetting the address as I had fortunately remembered roughly where it was on the map and we walked directly to it.

We had one full day for Bird watching / sightseeing and with apologies to Rixxy who recommended Mariliden, we went for Vigeland Sculpture Park which had a few ponds and some reasonable woods and shrubs at the margins and the Norwegian Folk Museum and surrounds in Bygdoy.

Birding was OK for a city and we got quite a few trip ticks.

In Vigeland Park we got a fly over White Stork, Fieldfare Grey Heron, Graylag Geese, Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, Greenfinch, and Goldfinch and at the far extreme by a little stream with some reeds an unexpected Thrush Nightingale, Blackbird and Spotted Flycatcher.

Whilst at Bygdoy we had a first Nuthatch, Tree creeper and Herring, Black-headed and Common Gulls.

Trip back to Manchester the next day was without
incident, so all in all a highly successful trip with the key mammals of Polar Bear, Walrus, Reindeer, Arctic Fox and quite a few seals and whales all seen well.

Birds were never the focus of this trip but we were really pleased with the Nutcracker which was a complete surprise although in looking at the field guide and habitat description probably isn’t that unexpected.
List of Sightings

**Birds**
- Nutcracker*
- Swallow
- Song Thrush
- Fieldfare
- Blackbird
- Chaffinch
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Jackdaw
- Purple Sandpiper
- Iceland Gull
- Black Guillemot
- Puffin
- Barnacle Goose
- Red Phalarope
- Dunlin
- Long-tailed Skua*
- Common Gull
- Wood Pigeon
- Thrush Nightingale
- Starling
- Great Tit
- Tufted Duck
- Common Rosefinch
- Pied Wagtail
- Mistle Thrush
- Garden Warbler
- Willow Warbler
- Bullfinch
- Magpie
- Long-tailed Duck
- Arctic Skua
- Arctic Tern
- Brunnich’s Guillemot*
- Great Black-backed Gull
- Pink-footed Goose
- Sabine’s Gull
- Pectoral Sandpiper
- Grey Plover
- Black-headed Gull
- Swift
- Robin
- House Sparrow
- Treecreeper
- Greylag Goose
- Yellowhammer
- Blackcap
- Redwing
- Lesser Whitethroat
- Chiffchaff
- Greenfinch
- Hooded Crow
- Common Eider
- Glaucous Gull
- Little Auk
- Snow Bunting
- King Eider*
- Ptarmigan
- Ivory Gull
- Red-throated Diver
- Herring Gull
- White Stork
- Nuthatch
- Goldfinch
- Blue Tit
- Goldeneye
- Mallard

**Other Wildlife**
- Polar Bear*
- Dolphin*
- Arctic Fox*
- Walrus*
- Minke Whale
- Hump-backed Whale
- Svalbard Reindeer
- Ringed Seal*
- Fin Whale
- White-beaked
- Bearded Seal*
- Harp Seal*