



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Iceland

Land of Fire and Ice

22nd to 28th May 2022 (7 days)

Trip Report



Harlequin Duck by Nigel Redman

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Trip report compiled by Nigel Redman

Tour Summary

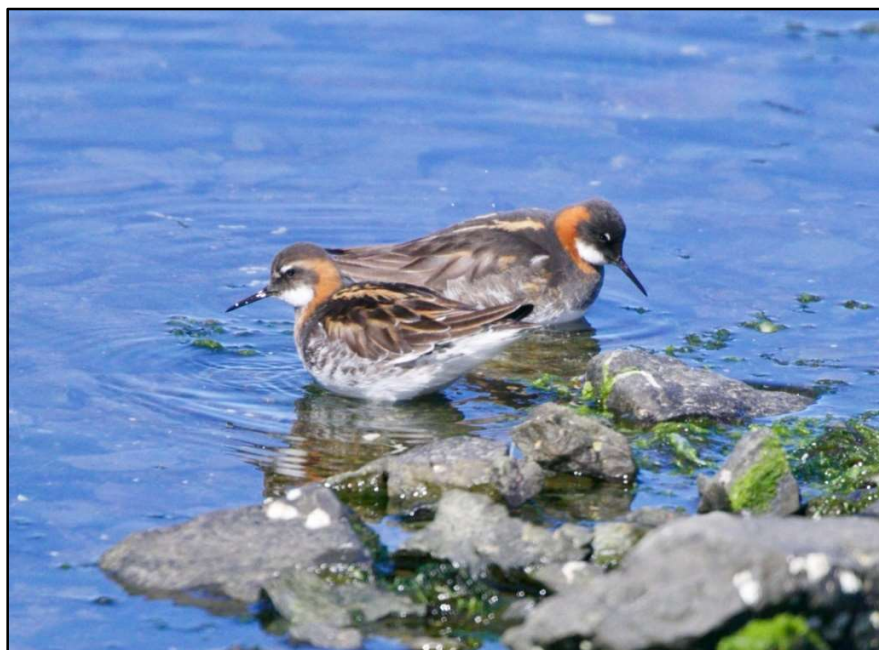
A tour to Iceland is a very special experience, and this year was no exception. In addition to some spectacular birds, we enjoyed magnificent scenery, some of the biggest waterfalls in Europe, vast lava fields and spouting geysirs, as well as the steaming fumaroles so typical of Iceland's world-famous geothermal activity. Ornithological highlights included bustling seabird colonies, a profusion of waders including big numbers of delightful Red-necked Phalaropes, and many species of wildfowl, most notably gorgeous Harlequin Ducks. Scarce or vagrant species included King Eider, Eurasian Coot and a Peregrine Falcon.

Our first day was gloriously sunny, but rather windy, as we headed north towards the Snaefellsnes peninsula. We made many stops, notably at Borgarvegur Bay and at Myrar. There were many waders in their breeding finery, including gorgeous Black-tailed Godwits and Red-necked Phalaropes. The bays harboured hundreds of migrant Red Knots, most in their russet breeding plumage, and the fields at Myrar held around 300 Whooper Swans, as well as a few geese; a pair of Rock Ptarmigans also showed well here. But the bird of the day was an immaculate Great Northern Diver (Common Loon) in full summer plumage.

We had perfect conditions for our trip to Flatey Island. Here we enjoyed close-up views of Red-necked Phalaropes and Snow Buntings, as well as many pale-bellied Brent Geese and Atlantic Puffins. In the afternoon, we headed west along the Snaefellsnes peninsula, enjoying both Glaucous and Iceland Gulls



Snow Bunting by Nigel Redman



Red-necked Phalaropes by Nigel Redman

Northern Divers. We also picked up our first vagrant, a Eurasian Coot, and on the Laxa River we enjoyed many pairs of Barrow's Goldeneyes.

Some rain at Myvatn did not dampen our spirits, and we enjoyed a wide range of waterfowl there. We had incredible views of Harlequin Ducks and Barrow's Goldeneyes. Red-necked Phalaropes were unbelievably numerous, and a territorial squabble between three Great Northern Divers at close range delighted the photographers. In the afternoon we visited the steaming fumaroles at Hverir and Europe's largest waterfall at Dettifoss.

The return from Myvatn was largely a travel day, but a stop to watch a pair of White-tailed Eagles at their nest was memorable. We timed it well, as we managed to observe a changeover at the nest. Eventually we reached Geysir, at the heart of the Golden Circle. We spent a whole day visiting the three principal sites of the Golden Circle. First, we admired the Strokkur Geysir, with its regularly erupting plume of steam, followed by a visit to the magnificent waterfall of Gullfoss, probably the most impressive of all of Iceland's waterfalls.

But we spent most of our time at Pingvellir, exploring the rift created by the slowly separating American and

en route, but a passing Merlin gave only fleeting views. At the western headland, we found a pod of Orcas close inshore, while the cliffs had breeding Brännich's Guillemots alongside Common Guillemots and Razorbills. On the way back, a single Horned Grebe showed well.

Our journey to Lake Myvatn was punctuated by many short stops. The most notable birds were two groups of stunning Harlequin Ducks on a fast-flowing river, but we also found numerous Pink-footed Geese, two more Iceland Gulls, another Merlin, and several more Great



**Brännich's and Common Guillemots /
Thick-billed and Common Murres by Nigel Redman**



Great Northern Divers / Common Loons by Nigel Redman

Lighthouse. Hundreds of Manx Shearwaters were gathering offshore, but distant whale blows were too far out to be identifiable, although several leaping White-beaked Dolphins were seen by some. Our rarest find of the trip was a Peregrine Falcon which suddenly appeared, dashing across the shoreline in pursuit of a wader. Sadly, it was not a Gyr Falcon, but in Icelandic terms it was a much more interesting bird, as the species barely occurs annually there.

We finished the tour at Reykjanesviti, at the southwestern tip of the peninsula. Here we enjoyed the noise and bustle of a large colony of Kittiwakes, as well as a variety of other seabirds. But, sadly, the only Great Auk was a large bronze statue, placed here in homage to this long-extinct species, as this is the site where the last two birds were slaughtered in 1844.

The species list may be small on an Iceland trip, but there is always plenty to see and enjoy. We were also mostly lucky with the weather this year.

Eurasian tectonic plates. Here, we enjoyed a very obliging Eurasian Wren, and super-close views of Red-throated Divers.

Our final day was spent exploring the Reykjanes Peninsula. An early success was an immature male King Eider near Keflavik, which was associating with a small group of Common Eiders.

We spent some time seawatching at Gardur



Horned Grebe by Nigel Redman

Iceland - Land of Fire and Ice 2022

Annotated List of species recorded

Birds (73 species in total)

Nomenclature and taxonomy follow Gill, F, Donsker, D. & Rasmussen, P. (eds). 2022. IOC World Bird List (v 12.1). Doi 10.14344/IOC.ML.12.1.

IUCN codes: CR = Critically endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened

Ducks, Geese & Swans *Anatidae*

- Brant Goose/Brent Goose** *Branta bernicla hrota*
About 100 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and 50 Flatey Island 23.5. All were of the pale-bellied form.
- Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis*
One bird was seen with Greylags and Pinkfeet in Myrar on 22.5.
- Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*
Commonly encountered and seen every day with a peak count of 120 on 24.4.
- Pink-footed Goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus*
6 Myrar 22.5, 80 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 6 Myvatn 25.5 and 4 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5.
- Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*
300 Myrar 22.5, 100 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 250 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 20 Myvatn 25.5, 200 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5 and 6 Pingvellir 27.5.
- Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*
10 Borgarvegur Bay 22.5 and 4 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5.
- Gadwall** *Mareca strepera strepera*
4 Myvatn 24.5 and 8 Myvatn 25.5.
- Eurasian Wigeon** *Mareca penelope*
6 Myrar 22.5, 4 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 4 Myvatn 24.5, 20 Myvatn 25.5 and 10 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5.
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*
Small numbers seen every day with a peak count of 20 on 24.4.
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*
2 males Myvatn 25.5.
- Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*
4 Myrar 22.5, 2 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 2 Myvatn 25.5 and 3 Pingvellir 27.5.
- Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*
Very common on Lake Myvatn. Smaller numbers elsewhere and seen daily.
- Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila marila*
2 Myrar 22.5, 2 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and up to 50 per day at Myvatn 24–26.5.
- King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis*
1 immature male in Keflavik harbour 28.5, associating with Common Eiders.
- Common Eider (NT)** *Somateria mollissima*
Commonly encountered around the coast and seen most days, often in small flocks.
- Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus*
10 Blönduós 24.5, 25 Myvatn 25.5, 5 Myvatn 26.5 and 2 Pingvellir 27.5.
- Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*
Up to 12 each day at Myvatn 24–26.5; invariably in pairs.

Long-tailed Duck (VU)*Clangula hyemalis*

2 Hvammstangi 24.5, 4 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5 and up to 20 per day Myvatn 24–26.5.

Barrow's Goldeneye*Bucephala islandica*

70 Laxa River 24.5, 60 Myvatn and Laxa River 25.5 and 20 Myvatn 26.5.

Common Merganser/Goosander*Mergus merganser merganser*

6 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 3 Blönduós 24.5 and 1 Myvatn 25.5.

Red-breasted Merganser*Mergus serrator*

2 Keflavik 22.5, 2 Flatey 23.5, 2 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 4 Myvatn 24.5, 10 Myvatn 25.5, 6 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5, 8 Pingvellir 27.5 and 4 Keflavik 28.5.

Pheasants & Allies Phasianidae**Rock Ptarmigan***Lagopus muta islandorum*

2 Myrar 22.5, 2 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 2 Myvatn 25.5, 10 Myvatn–Husavik 26.5 and 1 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5.

Pigeons & Doves Columbidae**Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon***Columba livia domestica*

3 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and 1 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5.

Rails, Crakes & Coots Rallidae**Eurasian Coot***Fulica atra*

1 on a roadside pool, Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5. This species is considered a vagrant to Iceland, although it has been suspected of breeding occasionally.

Grebes Podicipedidae**Horned Grebe/Slavonian Grebe***Podiceps auritus auritus*

1 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 6 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 12 Myvatn 25.5 and 4 Myvatn 26.5.

Oystercatchers Haematopodidae**Eurasian Oystercatcher***Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus*

Small numbers seen regularly around the coast.

Plovers Charadriidae**European Golden Plover***Pluvialis apricaria*

Commonly encountered and seen every day, with a peak count of 30 on 24.4.

Common Ringed Plover*Charadrius hiaticula*

Commonly encountered around the coast with a peak count of 40 at Hvammstangi 24.5.

Sandpipers & Snipes Scolopacidae**Eurasian Whimbrel***Numenius phaeopus*

Commonly encountered and seen every day, with a peak count of 20 on 26.4.

Black-tailed Godwit*Limosa limosa islandica*

Commonly seen: 30 Myrar 22.5, 10 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 6 Myvatn 25.5, 20 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5 and 6 Pingvellir 27.5.

Ruddy Turnstone*Arenaria interpres interpres*

Small numbers seen around the coast: 4 Keflavik 22.5, 10 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 10 Flatey Island 23.5, 12 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5 and 10 Reykjanes 28.5. This species is a winter visitor and passage migrant to Iceland.

Red Knot*Calidris canutus islandica*

About 200 Keflavik–Stykkisholmur 22.5, 100 Myrar 22.5, 15 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 15 Flatey Island 23.5, 60 Blönduós 24.5 and 1 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5. This species is mainly a passage migrant.

Sanderling*Calidris alba alba*

2 Blönduós 24.5 and about 50 Gardur Lighthouse 28.5. This species is mainly a passage migrant.

Dunlin*Calidris alpina schinzii*

50 Keflavik–Stykkisholmur 22.5, 2 Flatey Island 23.5, 30 Blönduós 24.5, 2 Myvatn–Husavik 26.5 and 2 Keflavik 28.5.

Purple Sandpiper*Calidris maritima*

2 Hvammstangi 24.5. This species mainly breeds inland.

Common Snipe*Gallinago gallinago faeroeensis*

Commonly seen and heard every day, with a peak count of 50 on 26.6.

Red-necked Phalarope*Phalaropus lobatus*

Commonly seen: 6 Myrar 22.5, 25 Flatey Island 23.5, 10 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 100 Myvatn 25.5, 2 Myvatn 26.5 and 10 Pingvellir 27.5.

Common Redshank*Tringa totanus robusta*

50 Keflavik–Stykkisholmur 22.5, 50 Myrar 22.5, 10 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 40 Flatey Island 23.5, 30 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 4 Myvatn 25.5, 6 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5, 6 Pingvellir 27.5 and 4 Reykjanes 28.5.

Gulls, Terns & Skimmers Laridae**Black-legged Kittiwake***Rissa tridactyla tridactyla*

Common on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and at Reykjanes 28.5.

Black-headed Gull*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Small numbers seen every day, with a peak count of 30 on 25.5.

Common Gull*Larus canus canus*

3 Keflavik–Stykkisholmur 22.5, 1 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5 and 10 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5.

Great Black-backed Gull*Larus marinus*

2 Myrar 22.5, 6 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 1 Blönduós 24.5 and 10 Reykjanes 28.5.

Glaucous Gull*Larus hyperboreus leuceteres*

40 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 1 Flatey Island 23.5, 6 Blönduós 24.5, 10 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5 and 1 Gardur Lighthouse 28.5.

Iceland Gull*Larus glaucoides*

3 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 2 Blönduós 24.5, 2 Husavik 26.5 and 1 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5.

European Herring Gull*Larus argentatus argenteus*

10 Keflavik 22.5, 2 Blönduós 24.5 and 1 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5 and several Reykjanes 28.5.

Lesser Black-backed Gull*Larus fuscus graellsii*

Commonly seen, sometimes in large numbers, and seen every day except 25.5.

Arctic Tern*Sterna paradisaea*

Commonly encountered and seen every day. Largest colonies were on Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and Reykjanes 28.5.

Skuas Stercorariidae**Parasitic Jaeger/Arctic Skua***Stercorarius parasiticus*

3 Myrar 22.5, 1 Flatey Island 23.5, 3 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 2 Myvatn 25.5, 8 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5 and 8 Reykjanes 28.5. Almost all were dark morph birds.

Auks *Alcidae*

Thick-billed Murre/Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia lomvia*

4 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5.

Common Murre/Common Guillemot *Uria aalge aalge*

Many at colonies on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and Reykjanes 28.5.

Razorbill *Alca torda islandica*

Many at colonies on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and Reykjanes 28.5.

Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle*

10 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 40 Flatey Island 23.5, 1 Hvammstangi 24.5, 1 Blönduós 24.5 and 10 Reykjanesta 28.5.

Atlantic Puffin (VU) *Fratercula arctica*

About 50 from the ferry to Flatey Island in the Breiðafjörður 23.5.

Loons *Gaviidae*

Red-throated Loon/Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

5 Myrar 22.5, 6 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 4 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5, 1 Myvatn 25.5 and 5 Pingvellir 27.5.

Common Loon/Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

1 Myrar 22.5, 1 Hvammstangi 24.5, up to 6 Myvatn 24–26.5, 2 Pingvellir 27.5 and 2 Keflavik 28.5.

Petrels & Shearwaters *Procellariidae*

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Commonly encountered around the coast, notably at colonies on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and Reykjanes 28.5.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus puffinus*

At least 500 offshore at the Gardur Lighthouse 28.5.

Gannets & Boobies *Sulidae*

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

1 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and about 30 offshore at the Gardur Lighthouse 28.5.

Cormorants & Shags *Phalacrocoracidae*

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*

3 Flatey Island 23.5, 1 Hvammstangi 24.5, 2 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5 and 2 Gardur Lighthouse 28.5.

European Shag *Gulosus aristotelis aristotelis*

1 Keflavik–Stykkisholmur 22.5, about 15 Flatey Island 23.5 and 3 Reykjanesta 28.5.

Kites, Hawks & Eagles *Accipitridae*

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla albicilla*

2 at a nest near Borganes 26.5.

Falcons *Falconidae*

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

1 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 1 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5 and 1 Myvatn 25.5.

Peregrine Falcon

1 hunting over the shore at Gardur Lighthouse 28.1. This species is a near-annual vagrant to Iceland.

Crows & Jays *Corvidae***Northern Raven***Corvus corax varius*

Singles or pairs seen every day, with a peak count of 10 on 26.5.

Wrens *Troglodytidae***Eurasian Wren***Troglodytes troglodytes islandicus*

1 seen well at Pingvellir 27.5.

Starlings *Sturnidae***Common Starling***Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris*

Small numbers seen almost every day, especially around towns.

Thrushes *Turdidae***Redwing***Turdus iliacus coburni*

Very common throughout; the commonest and most familiar passerine on Iceland.

Common Blackbird*Turdus merula merula*

Rather scarce on Iceland, and mainly close to habitation: 2 Keflavik 22.5, 1 Flatey Island 23.5, 1 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5, 1 Reykjavik 27.5 and 3 Reykjanes 28.5.

Chats & Old World Flycatchers *Muscicapidae***Northern Wheatear***Oenanthe oenanthe leucorhoa*

2 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5 and 1 Myvatn–Geysir 26.5.

Wagtails & Pipits *Motacillidae***White Wagtail***Motacilla alba*

Singles or pairs seen every day with a peak count of 20 on 23.5.

Meadow Pipit (NT)*Anthus pratensis*

Commonly encountered throughout with up to 20 per day.

Finches *Fringillidae***Common Redpoll***Acanthis flammea*

2 Borgarvegur Bay 22.5, 10 Myvatn 25.5 and 6 Geysir–Reykjavik 27.5.

Longspurs & Snow Buntings *Calcariidae***Snow Bunting***Plectrophenax nivalis insulae*

3 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5, 12 Flatey Island 23.5 and 2 Stykkisholmur–Myvatn 24.5.

Mammals (2 species in total)

Oceanic Dolphins *Delphinidae*

White-beaked Dolphin

Lagenorhynchus albirostris

At least 3 offshore at Gardur Lighthouse 28.5.

Killer Whale/Orca

Orcinus orca

At least 6 Snaefellsnes Peninsula 23.5.

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