



Harlequin Ducks, near Húsavík - a highlight of the tour (All photos taken on this tour by Mike Watson)

ICELAND

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'There are no lifers for me' is the usual thing I hear listers say about Iceland. This is such a shame as they miss out on one of Europe's, if not the World's classic birding destinations. Life birds or not (of course none for me either) Iceland is simply an awesome birding experience and although it is limited in terms of variety of species, its star attractions shine very brightly. We had a fantastic time, back after an eight year gap, and many birding highlights in a stunning volcanic landscape included: seven Gyrfalcons; a pair of White-tailed Eagles tending their chick; more than 120 Harlequin Ducks; 130 Barrow's Goldeneyes; two Red and countless Red-necked Phalaropes on the delightful islet of Flatey and elsewhere; seven Long-tailed Jaegers (or Skuas) at their only breeding site in Iceland as well as Thick-billed Murres (or Brünnich's Guillemots) on their breeding cliffs. Other northern specialities included Rock Ptarmigan, Pale-bellied Brent Goose, Great Northern Loon (or Diver), Horned (or Slavonian) Grebe, Purple Sandpiper, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. 'Land bird' species were few, in fact we only just made it into double figures, but this included an Icelandic rarity, in the form of Common Woodpigeon, of all things! We also found another rarity on our travels, a smart adult Little Gull at Lake Myvatn.

Mammals were also few with none of them on dry land but they did include five fantastic Humpback Whales and three Minke Whales on our very enjoyable whale-watching boat trips. Most other folks visiting Iceland were there to marvel at its landscape and we diverted from the birding trail several times to visit non-avian wonders of this incredible island including: Dettifoss (Europe's biggest waterfall by volume of water); Gulfoss (or the *'golden falls'*); Geysir (the site of the origin of the word of geyser, where the impressive *'Strokkur'* was blowing regularly during our visit) and finally Þingvellir (the site of Iceland's first parliament, set in a natural amphitheatre in rift right on Mid-Atlantic ridge). Did I mention the delicious seafood and wonderful people?

Snæfellsnes Peninsula and Breiðafjörður

Iceland's landscape had a profound effect on us all. It is a fascinating place and the long (at times) road transfers were made bearable by the scenery we passed by. The Snæfellsnes Peninsula is described as 'Iceland in miniature'. It has a bit of everything: menacing volcano cones; reindeer moss-covered lava fields; snow-capped mountains; impressive basalt sea cliffs; dramatically styled modernist churches; pretty brightly painted buildings with blue swathes of Nootka Lupins and Icelandic horses dotted here and there. Similarly most of Iceland's birds can be found here as well, although some of them in lower numbers than elsewhere. We left behind the comparative hustle and bustle of Reykjavík with its restaurants serving puffin, shag and Minke Whale dishes. It is definitely the most laid back and non-urban capital I have visited. Street cleaners were clearing up after the famous Friday night revellers as we headed for the small town of Stykkishólmur on the shore of Breiðafjörður, a large fairly shallow bay on Iceland's west coast. Stykkishólmur (population 1,100), gateway to the West Fjords is Iceland's 30th largest settlement and is even smaller than my present tiny hometown of Ribchester! After watching a very nice pair of Arctic Jaegers (or Skuas), approaching Stykkishólmur Becky was barely able to get a word out of her mouth 'there was a t-t-t-t-ptarmigan' and sure enough, by the roadside, eating dandelions was a fine pair of ptarmigans, the male very blotchy off-white now but the female cryptically patterned and looking exactly like a pile of dead grasses. Unfortunately an ill-timed band of bikers roared past flushing the ptarmigans out of sight but happily we were able to re-find them quite quickly and the male was rather approachable, allowing some great, close views. We also got our first look at the lovely subarctic Icelandic flora, including the pretty, purple Alpine Bartsia *Bartsia alpina*, Mountain Avens *Dryas octopetala* and Arctic Poppy *Papaver radicum*. Next evening we saw another male ptarmigan stood on a nice moss-covered lump of roadside lava on Helgafjellssveit on our way to Hellisandur. It is great to see them almost at sea level in Iceland!

Our first, sunny, evening was spent in the Kolgrafafjörður area where there was an amazing gathering of thousands of Northern Fulmars, feeding in the fjord. There had been some huge die-offs of herring here last winter, particularly in February this year, when thousands of tonnes of dead fish were found washed up on the shore. They were thought to have died owing to a lack of oxygen in the water. There were also several tens of Glaucous Gulls amongst the Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls as well as our first Greater Scaup, Red-throated Loons (or Divers) and Red-necked Phalaropes of note. We spent some considerable time checking the flocks of thousands of eiders along the peninsula over the course of our stay but were unable to find a king amongst them. However, the huge rafts were pretty impressive in their own right. I couldn't resist staying out birding until very late, it was great to be back in the midnight sun again, and was 'rewarded' with a flyover Common Woodpigeon, an Icelandic rarity, especially on the west coast. The small remnants of natural vegetation on the edge of town were full of breeding shorebirds including Common Ringed Plovers, European Golden Plovers, Common Snipes, Common Redshanks and lovely Eurasian Whimbrels everywhere, their curlew-like, piping display flight calls were a feature of the tour.

Rock Ptarmigan, Stykkishólmur



Above: Thick-billed & Common Murres & Kittiwakes and below: Harlequin Ducks

On the basalt sea cliffs of Onverdarnes we managed to find a few Thick-billed Murres (or Brünnich's Guillemots), huddled with their Common Murre (or Guillemot) cousins and sharing inhospitable nest sites with kittiwakes and Razorbills as waves crashed on the rocks below them. They are surprisingly unobtrusive being roughly the same shade of dark brown as Common Murres but the white cutting edge of their thicker bill is always quite prominent. Tucked out of the wind and rain for a while, we enjoyed some great views of the comings and goings from the ledges. Offshore there was a small number of Great Northern Loons (or Divers), all but one in smart breeding plumage as well as several Northern Gannets. Continuing south through a vast lava field dotted with Mountain Avens on the western flank of Snæfellsnes-jökull we stopped off at a couple of places on the south coast, first at Malariff, the site of a wonderful cliff top basalt bench and then Arnastapi, where it was now raining so we dropped in to yet another great eatery. Further east the weather had cleared and we checked many of the shallow coastal lagoons, where highlights were: breeding Whooper Swans with flotillas of cygnets; Great Northern Loons calling on silvery flat calm water; Black-tailed Godwits and Eurasian Whimbrels calling all around us; roadside Horned (or Slavonian) Grebes in their fine breeding dress; marauding Parasitic Jaegers (or Arctic Skuas) but best of all, our first Harlequin Ducks, well spotted by Julian while others slumbered, on a small river flowing down from a mountain pass. We braved the non-biting (honestly?) insects for some great views.

Harlequin is a tough little duck that stays in Iceland all year round, breeding on fast-flowing streams in spring and then descending to the coast in summer. Pre-breakfast forays along the coast produced another 20 Pale-bellied Brent Geese at Hellisandur, some breeding plumaged Purple Sandpipers on the quay at Olafsvík, more Harlequins and lots of Glaucous Gulls, including some piled up in a dead heap near Rif. No wonder they are so shy here, the locals obviously still kill them, presumably eider down farmers protecting their beloved ducklings. Arctic Terns seem to breed in a continuous loose colony for miles along the coast here and fortunately we did not need to risk getting mobbed like the ravens that decided to run the gauntlet near Rif. The first of a few Common Redpolls we saw in Iceland were in a small arboretum opposite our hotel at Hellisandur, together with the ubiquitous Redwings. The almost perfect snow-capped cone of Snæfellsjökull (1446m) was shrouded in cloud for most of the day that we did our 'round the peninsula' drive but when the clouds lifted it dominated the view in this area. It is probably best known as the setting for French author Jules Verne's 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth' – "Whoever descends into the crater of Sneffels Yocul can reach the center of the earth". It also dominates local people's thought; even the pretty blonde waitress at the small turf-roofed restaurant at Arnastapi had 'Jökull' (= glacier) tattooed on her forearm. Fancy living on a volcano, remembering that it's 1100 known years of dormancy is only the blink of an eye in geological time? Research has shown that the Snæfellsjökull system has erupted at least 25 times in the last 10,000 years. I wonder when the next one will be? In fact the volcanic nature of the country dominates everything in Iceland in one way or another, T-shirts in gift shops read 'Don't f**k with Iceland, we may not have cash but we've got the ash'.





This page: Purple Sandpiper, Olafsvík & next page (from top): Red-necked Phalarope; Flatey & Pale-bellied Brent Goose

During our stay at Stykkisholmur we took a day trip on the Baldur ferry to the incredibly picturesque island of Flatey. Passing numerous small skerries in Breiðafjörður dotted with eiders, shags, puffins and Black Guillemots after about an hour we reached Flatey, which means 'flat island'. Barely off the quay, we were greeted by Red-necked Phalaropes, which were feeding on tiny insects that had been attracted to dandelion flowers by the path. They were actually everywhere all over the island. I have seen plenty of these delightful little birds very closely before but never anything like this. Continuing further, Snow Buntings were singing from the rooftops of the small houses and feeding recently fledged young in rhubarb patches in the gardens. Common Redshanks and Arctic Terns scolded us as we passed through their territories and then we began our search for our own 'Flatey Enigma', the Red Phalarope. We did not make much progress thanks to an unwanted heat haze of all things! There were plenty of Red-necked Phalaropes around, crèches of eider ducklings with their watchful mums and aunties, Common Ringed Plovers, Dunlins and a very welcome write-in for this tour, Pale-bellied Brent Goose but none of the hoped-for phalarope, yet. Red Phalarope is now a rare breeding bird in Iceland and clings on in only a few places. I managed a few nice photos of the goose, which ought to have been on its breeding grounds in Arctic Canada by now, against the background of eelgrass and seaweed (which I had to sit in, soaking wet, for a while - sorry for the bad smell for the rest of the day!). We adjourned to some lovely phalarope pools in the main 'village' and enjoyed wonderful hot chocolate and apple cake in the adorable little Hótel Flatey, one of the nicest places we ate at on this tour.

Flatey is only two kilometres long and one kilometre at its widest and in the summer it is a retreat of artists, writers and wealthy bohemians as well as a number of original families. It's small church was built in 1926 and it has a winter population of only five people. It was also the setting for Viktor Arnar Ingolfsson's 2012 acclaimed novel 'The Flatey Enigma', which refers to the Flatey Book, an important medieval manuscript written between 1387 and 1394 by the monks who lived at the monastery here. The sky had now clouded over, the heat haze had subsided and visibility improved greatly so we returned to the edge of the area restricted in the breeding season from where we eventually managed to scope a couple of brick-red Red Phalarope females on a quite distant island. I checked Google maps later and the range of our observations varied from 300 to 500 metres. Even at this distance in the good light we could still make out their bill colour and mantle braces etc. First seen scrapping high up on a beach, one of them made several c.300-400m long self-advertising 'Circle-flights' as described in BWP vol. 3, landing within a couple of yards of where it took off from its seaweed lookout point. Unfortunately they seemed too preoccupied with holding their territory to wander over to our position so we left them to it and returned to their much more obliging Red-necked cousins, via a Ruddy Turnstone (the only one of the tour), and the Hotel Flatey where it seemed like some folks had not left since lunchtime. All too soon it was time to catch the evening ferry back to the mainland, along with the other day-trippers and weekenders. This was one of the nicest days I have had on a tour, I could have spent much more time on Flatey, photographing the confident birds, hanging out in the Hótel Flatey, watching the world go by and by the way, did I mention the delicious seafood?





Above: Arctic Tern, Flatey

Eventually it was time to leave the peninsula and head back northeast. We paused at Stykkisholmur for another boat trip, this time into Breiðafjörður, originally intended to be a visit to a White-tailed Eagle eyrie, however, we quickly learned that the eagles had recently deserted their nest. The trip was still very enjoyable as a way to see some common seabirds like puffins, shags and fulmars close up, jaw-dropping rock formations and a terrific tidal race not to mention a sushi experience of freshly dragged up seafood. We learned that Erik the Red had used these islands to hide from his enemies after he had been declared an outlaw and we also marveled at the numerous basalt columns, similar to the 'Giant's Causeway', some of them bearing weird transverse bars as well. Then came our first experience of Iceland's gravel roads as we cut cross-country back to route one. I don't enjoy driving on them much, although they do have ingenious blind summit dividing signs to avoid head-on crashes. Again sharp-eyed Becky came up trumps with a nice female Merlin in the middle of nowhere. We also added a drake Long-tailed Duck at the Blönduos river mouth; numerous Pink-footed Goose families along the Héradsvötn river (they apparently nested along the river this year when the upland areas were still snow-covered in the late spring); a Short-eared Owl just outside Iceland's second city (not counting Reykjavík's suburbs), Akureyri (population 17,754!) and finally some redpolls at a roadside stop. Eventually we reached the base for our exploration of the northeast over the next three days at Raudaskrida.

Húsavík and Skjálfandi Bay

The hillside behind our spotlessly clean and tidy hotel was inhabited by numerous shorebirds. Golden plovers, whimbrels, snipe and Black-tailed Godwits called all around us and marauding Arctic Skuas occasionally passed overhead. Male Rock Ptarmigans also scolded us when we approached too closely, however, their females remained well out of sight at this time of year. The hillside itself was quite boggy and dotted with numerous lovely plants including Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride*, Alpine Bartsia and Water Avens *Geum rivale* but it was only later that I discovered that Raudaskrida means 'Red Landslide'. Hopefully this lovely place will be spared, unlike the large area of hillside that fell away across the main road further up the valley earlier this summer after the very rapid spring snowmelt. On our first morning in the northeast we had a whale-watching trip booked out of Húsavík ('Bay of Houses'), population 2,237. This was actually the first place in Iceland to be settled by a Norse man, in AD870, when Viking Garðarr Svavarsson spent a winter here. According to history he owned land in Zealand (Denmark) and was married to a woman from the Hebrides. During a voyage to those isles to claim his inheritance from his father-in-law, he sailed into a storm, which pushed his ship far to the north until he reached the eastern coast of Iceland. Húsavík was formerly a main outlet for silica mined at Lake Myvatn but now its main sources of income are fishing and tourism (particularly whale-watching). The whale watching trips were perfect in every respect. We received a flawless narrative from the well-trained callers and even hot chocolate and cinnamon buns for the return dash to port. We did two early morning trips while the Skjálfandi (or 'shaky') Bay was still fairly calm and had some really nice encounters with Humpback and Minke Whales. The Humpies were very obliging and circled the boats but the Minkes were not nearly as



Above: Northern Minke Whale and below: Humpback Whale, Skjálfandi Bay

curious, probably owing to hunting. On our last morning most of us saw a breach and all saw some fin slapping etc. but the majority of the time we made do with some excellent blowing, back arching and tail flukes. The Minkes showed head, back and fin but not tail as usual. The operators know that only whales will do for most of their demanding customers so they sped past White-beaked Dolphin without stopping. These were probably the best whale watching trips I have done so far even though we did not see the big blue one - they still spend the summer along Iceland's north coast their visits into Skjálfandi Bay are still fairly infrequent and cannot be predicted. After another great seafood meal we left Húsavík for a small stream that entered the sea where our man on the spot had suggested we might see some drake Harlequin Ducks. We were not disappointed, finding a flock of 60 of these wonderful little ducks that allowed some fairly close approach. However, we had some other areas to check this afternoon so we had to move on around the Tjörnes peninsula. Many of the eutrophic lakes in this area were created by subsidence during earthquakes, one large lake as recently as 1977 during the 'Krafla volcano-tectonic episode', its name Skjálfavatn meaning 'shaking water'. There was nothing new for us along this stretch despite some searching, except for some nice Northern Green Orchids *Platanthera hyperborea* so we continued to a remote barren plain, covered with tiny black lava pebbles, where our quarry was soon upon us, an irate Great Skua (or Bonxie), which flew several hundred metres to check us out, joined later by its mate and another pair. These birds had sought a very secluded place to rear their young.





Above: the Mid-Atlantic rift at Asbyrgi (Europe to the left and America to the right!) and below: Dettifoss.

We also enjoyed our first look at the mid-Atlantic rift near Asbyrgi, the seam which is being torn apart to create new land on the island, which will one day probably sit as a new continent in the North Atlantic between America and Europe. The European plate lay to one side of us, and the American plate to the other. The rift itself moves apart by one centimetre per year, which is quite a lot in geological time... but it manages much more than this during periods of earthquake activity. A detour took us to the totally awesome Dettifoss (*'Falling Waterfall'*), Europe's largest waterfall by volume with 193 cubic metres per second going over the 100m wide and 45m high drop into the narrow canyon of the Jökulsá á Fjöllum river, which is a glacial melt river of the Vatnajökull (*'Lakes Glacier'*). Although often shrouded in its own spray, which produced some nice rainbows, it was a sound as well as a sight experience as the huge volume of brownish glacial water thundered over the falls. The waterfall appeared in the 2012 sci-fi film *'Prometheus'* as an alien planet landscape.



Lake Myvatn and Hverfjall (*'Crater Mountain'*), an almost perfect tuff cone resulting from an eruption c.2700 years ago

Lake Myvatn

When I was a child I borrowed John Gooders's 1970 book *'Where to watch birds in Britain and Europe'* from the library numerous times. It has a chapter about Iceland and I remember reading about one site in particular, Lake Myvatn. He wrote *"It is, of course unthinkable that any one should go to Iceland for birds without visiting Myvatn"*. Lake Myvatn is full of waterfowl, a magical area of crater lakes and marshes surrounded by volcano cones, root-less craters, historic lava flows and hot springs. Myvatn famously means *'lake of the midges'* but fortunately it was quite breezy when we visited and therefore did not experience much of the dreaded swarms of insects. Rafts of Tufted Ducks (now I know where they all come from!) were the most prominent of the 12 duck species that we saw, which also included a handful of smart Common Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks and around 130 regal Barrow's Goldeneyes. Horned Grebes were busy tending their nests around the lake and we also saw phalaropes feeding actively on a black volcanic beach of the lake, with small waves breaking like on the seashore and while watching them we stumbled upon a super-smart, black-hooded adult Little Gull, Iceland's rarest breeding bird. One pair of these old world gulls bred last year in a remote protected area of Lake Myvatn. However, as soon as it appeared it was gone, foraging away along the shore with Black-headed Gulls. My favourite site in the Myvatn area was its outlet, the Laxá River. Flocks of tiny Red-necked Phalaropes were busily feeding, tucked into eddies along its banks, numerous ducklings (wigeon and Mallard) were amongst them, some with their mothers and some not. Many must get separated here. There were also numerous female Harlequin Ducks along this stretch of the river and we were very fortunate to be able to watch a few shoot the rapids in the spectacular style of Andean Torrent or New Zealand's Blue Ducks. The males usually leave the area for the coast by late June but we did have one rather shabby first year drake as well as a flyover adult. Completing the picture, the banks of the river were carpeted with pretty subarctic plants, more Mountain and Water Avens along with a few Frog Orchids. Tucked away amongst the lava at Myvatn is a small birch woodland with a carpet of Wood Crane's-bill *Geranium sylvaticum*, where we had our best views of 'Northwestern' Common Redpoll as well as the large endemic form of Eurasian Wren, *islandicus*, belting out its song in typical fashion. The woodland was also full of Redwings but nothing else this time – it is apparently a good bet for a scarce visitor from Scandinavia - Brambling. We also visited some fascinating hot springs at Námakolla, where the black mud of foul-smelling sulphurous hot springs bubbled away and jets of steam were emitted from vents. Traces of beautiful, bright yellow sulphur could be seen everywhere on the ground.



Above: Little Gull, Lake Myvatn - Iceland's rarest breeding bird and below: a female Harlequin Duck on the Laxá River.



Above: Barrow's Goldeneye, Laxá River & below: Gulfoss's lower step and right: mighty Strokkur gets ready to blow!

The Golden Circle

The final leg of our journey was a very long driving day partly re-tracing our previous route but detouring for a pair of White-tailed Eagles, tending their chick in the unlikeliest of sites for an eyrie. In Iceland they sometimes nest on tiny skerries in the fjords. We were lucky to see one of the eagles fly too! We also did some significant gravel road driving to within 10km of the huge Langjökull, one of Iceland's larger glaciers. Progress on these roads is so slow that they seem to go on forever. Birds were very few here on the lava fields, which were barren except for a few pink cushions of Moss Campion but we did manage a lovely male Merlin and a Common Ringed Plover, miles from anywhere. Keen to get to our next destination we brushed aside a couple of small river crossings that would be a bigger test earlier in the season or after rain. Finally we made it back onto tarmac and the excellent Gulfoss ('Golden Waterfall'), with its thundering double step falls and deep canyon. The programme for the final morning of the tour was simply some very relaxing sightseeing, first the impressive Strokkur geysir at the small hamlet of Geysir – the origin of the meaning of the word. This is the most active of Iceland's geysers, erupting every few minutes. The challenge is to capture an image of the surreal looking blue dome of water of the geyser, just before it bursts to send a steaming jet into the air.



Next on the 'golden circle' of tourist attractions was Þingvellir ('Assembly Fields'), the site of Iceland's first parliament, established in AD930, a place where the first Icelanders gathered, some of them travelling overland for weeks to get there, to hear the law recited, disputes settled and sometimes punishments dished out, like an adulterous women being drowned in a sack! There were lots of other reasons for ordinary people to come here, merchants, sword-sharp-eners, and tanners would sell their goods and people would renew acquaintances and be entertained. What makes this place so special is that it is a dramatic open air site and is also situated directly on the jagged Mid-Atlantic ridge rift. The only drawback is that everyone else thinks so and it is firmly on the bucket listers' Golden Circle' 300km mini tour of Iceland, so it was quite crowded by the time we arrived, with tourists from all over. We heard American accents and saw numerous East Asian visitors complete with obligatory face masks. Back at the start, we passed the Hallgrímskirkja in Reykjavík again, a truly spectacular church, which dominates the Reykjavík skyline, its tower shaped like either a shark's tooth or the bow of a Viking longboat, it stands over the statue of Leif Ericson, c.970-1020 (son of Eric the Red), battle axe in hand and the first European discoverer of 'Vinland' – present day North America, probably the coast of Newfoundland



Leif Ericson, discoverer of North America, the Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík and below: Long-tailed Jaeger

Reykjavík does not feel like a city at all, with a population of 119,000. It is smaller than High Wycombe and would only just scrape into the top 60 largest towns and cities in the UK, ahead of Eastbourne but behind Accrington! The whole country's population is only 322,900, significantly smaller even than Luxembourg, Malta or the Bahamas! Everywhere we went we found the local people incredibly polite and friendly. This, combined with a good road network, spotlessly clean hotels, excellent food, especially seafood, makes Iceland a very enjoyable country to travel in. After our 2650km road trip we felt like we had seen quite a lot of it.



Gyrfalcons (female on left), 'somewhere' in Iceland and below: another delightful Red-necked Phalarope.

Finally there is a bird that is always the number one target for folks. At some point on our tour we also had the good fortune to locate a Gyrfalcon nest, a magnificent pair with three chicks, which we were able to watch from a very safe distance as the adults launched hunting sorties over the surrounding area, at one point being mobbed by a tiny Merlin. This was a real highlight for everyone. On another day we saw a second pair of Gyrfalcons at a different site and although they may have had a nest somewhere in the vicinity we could not see it. Interestingly three of the four adults were very pale indeed and could easily be taken for Greenland birds. Parts of Iceland have the densest population of this, the world's largest falcon but unfortunately they are still robbed occasionally, presumably to order, for people who want one on their arm. Therefore we cannot give a clue to their whereabouts. As a bonus, on another day we found ourselves 'in the middle of nowhere' as the locals call it, watching a total of seven ultra-graceful Long-tailed Skuas at their only breeding site in Iceland. The first characteristically flew over to our cars to check us out and we were then treated to some nice views of birds hovering over the upland plains across their territories. These birds were first discovered here around 10 years ago and have been very slowly growing in numbers and happily have not yet been fitted with unsightly tracking paraphernalia, as had the Blómstrandhalvøya birds some of us saw the previous summer in Svalbard.





Eurasian Whimbrel amongst Alpine Bartsia, two very prominent features of the wonderful Icelandic landscape.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

The most up to date referenced taxonomic list referred to in the Tour Report is that of the **IOC World Bird Names**. Gill, F and Donsker, D (Eds). 2012. IOC World Bird Names (v2.11). Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

(E) = Endangered, (V) = Vulnerable, (NT) = Near Threatened, (DD) = Data Deficient.

Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus* ◊ Eight, scattered through the tour, the first was a pair near Stykkisholmur.
 Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* ◊ Up to 300 including many goslings by the Héradsvötn in North Iceland.
 Greylag Goose *Anser anser* Common throughout.
 Pale-bellied Brent Goose *Branta [bernicla] hrota* ◊ One on Flatey, Breiðafjörður and 20 at Hellisandur.
 Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* Common throughout, with a maximum of around 300 in Breiðafjörður.
 Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* One for Mike and Pete in Reykjavík.
 Gadwall *Anas strepera* Around 100 at Lake Myvatn.
 Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Up to around 300 at Lake Myvatn.
 Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Very common throughout.
 Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Only four noted, at Lake Myvatn.
 Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Small numbers throughout with a maximum of around 50 at Lake Myvatn.
 Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* Small numbers throughout with a maximum of c.500 at Lake Myvatn.
 Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* Small numbers throughout with a maximum of c.200 at Lake Myvatn.
 Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* Abundant throughout with maximum of c.4000 in Latravík.
 Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* ◊ A total of more than 120 seen, first noted in Dufgusdalur.



Harlequin Duck, Grundafjörður

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* Four at Lake Myvatn.
 Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* (VU) A scatter of around 15 birds, the first off the Blondüos river.
 Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* ◊ A total of c.130 seen in the Lake Myvatn area.
 Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* Common with a maximum of c.200 near Borganes.
 Red-throated Loon (R-t Diver) *Gavia stellata* A scatter of around 30 seen.
 Great Northern Loon (GN Diver, Common L) *Gavia immer* A scatter of 17 seen, most in breeding dress.
 Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* Abundant with a maximum of around 3000 at Kolgrafafjörður.
 Horned Grebe (Slavonian G) *Podiceps auritus* 12 near Hof, c.40 at Lake Myvatn and 8 at Skjálfavatn.
 Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* Three off Onverdarnes were the only birds noted.
 European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* Common in Breiðafjörður. It is on the menu in Iceland!
 Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Small numbers in the coastal southwest.
 White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* At pair at their nest in SW Iceland had (at least) one chick.
 Merlin *Falco columbarius* A female in Laxárdalur, a male Mosaskarösfjall and one 'somewhere else'.
 Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus* ◊ Two pairs seen, one with three well grown juveniles.
 Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* Common in the southwest.
 European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* ◊ Common throughout, a feature of the tour.
 Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* Common throughout, many with tiny chicks.
 Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* Common, many still performing drumming display flights.
 Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* ◊ (NT) Common, particularly in the northeast.
 Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* Common throughout, their display flights particularly nice.
 Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Common throughout.
 Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* One lingering bird on Flatey, Breiðafjörður.
 Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* ◊ Three at Olafsvík in breeding plumage were the only birds seen.
 Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Small numbers throughout, their buzzing display flights were very enjoyable.
 Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* Common, especially on Flatey and at Lake Myvatn.
 Red Phalarope (Grey P) *Phalaropus fulicaria* ◊ Two females near Flatey, Breiðafjörður
 Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* Small numbers throughout.
 Little Gull *Larus minutus* One at Lake Myvatn was an Icelandic rarity.
 Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* Common throughout.
 Common Gull *Larus canus* Decidedly uncommon with a maximum of c.10 at Húsavík.
 Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* The most common large gull throughout.
 Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* ◊ Common in the SW with c.300 at Kolgrafafjörður the maximum estimate.
 Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides* ◊ Three at Húsavík and one at Blondüos. All were second calendar year birds.
 European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* Common in the southwest and northeast.
 Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus [fuscus] graellsii* Common the southwest.
 Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* Common throughout, particularly on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.
 Great Skua *Catharacta skua* ◊ Five from the Skjálfandi Bay trips and another four at a breeding colony.
 Long-tailed Jaeger (L-t Skua) *Stercorarius longicaudus* Seven at a colony 'in the middle of nowhere'.



Iceland Gull (second calendar year), Húsavík.

Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) *Stercorarius parasiticus* Small numbers noted throughout.
 Thick-billed Murre (Brünnich's Guillemot) *Uria lomvia* ◇ Six amongst the other auks at Onverdarnes.
 Common Murre (C Guillemot) *Uria aalge* Around 800 at Onverdarnes on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.
 Razorbill *Alca torda* ◇ Around 200 at Onverdarnes on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.
 Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle* ◇ Common in the southwest and small numbers in the northeast.
 Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica* ◇ Many hundreds in Breiðafjörður on the Flatey trip was the maximum.
 Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* (LO) One flew over Stykkisholmur at 2330(!) on 22 June.
 Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* Singles at Akureyri, Viðrar and Húsavík.
 Northern Raven *Corvus corax* Small numbers throughout.
 Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* ◇ Two seen and another heard at Lake Myvatn.
 Common Starling (European S) *Sturnus vulgaris* Common in the southwest.
 Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* A male for Mike at Pete in a Reykjavík garden at the start of the tour.
 Redwing *Turdus iliacus* Common throughout with many singing and feeding young.
 Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* Small numbers throughout, commonest in the southwest.
 White Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alba* Common throughout.
 Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* Very common throughout, the default passerine on Iceland.
 Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea* Small numbers noted, first seen well by all at Lake Myvatn.
 Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* ◇ Small numbers throughout, singing and feeding young on Flatey.

Mammals

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus* Singles at Kolgrafafjörður and Latravík.
 Northern Minke Whale (Minke W) *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* Three seen from the Skjálíandi Bay whale-watching trips.
 Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* Five seen from the Skjálíandi Bay whale-watching trips.
 Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* (NL) One for Debbie only in Skjálíandi Bay.
 White-beaked Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris* Three in Breiðafjörður and another three from the Skjálíandi Bay whale-watching trips.