



introduction

This was a much less wildlife focussed holiday as Iceland has a whole lot more to offer with its interesting history, geology and amazing scenery, with only one new species to offer me (Arctic Fox) on the trip the pressure was off or was it?

Iceland offers some speciality species which we would also be keen in seeing such as Harlequin duck and grey phalarope in breeding plumage and has some great whale watching.

In planning the wildlife parts of the trip I had a great deal of help from Edward B. Rickson who I offer many thanks for answering all my questions and giving me plenty of advice.

My wife and I travelled with WOW air from Gatwick to Keflavik, the checking process was chaotic in Keflavik (fine at Gatwick) but apart from that everything was fine.

I pre booked the accommodation and the Ferry to Flatey in advance (paid at time of booking), most accommodation had to be paid on arrival not all took credit cards so we made sure we had cash as well.

The photos are hyperlinked to larger versions

DIARY

13th June 2013

Arriving early afternoon, we picked up our hire car a red Mazda 2 (What a totally impractical car for gravel roads) from Thrifty and they were proud to tell us it was brand new (Boy would they regret that!) and headed off north. We made it past Reykjavik before rush hour and onto the Snaefellsness peninsular for a couple of tourist stops. The first had a nice family of **redshank** and the second some nice displaying **snipe**. As we headed over the pass to the north shore to look for the Orca Pod and alpine swift seen the previous day we entered into thick mist and poor visibility so those were off the menu. One area further east was mist free and here we found a few **white beaked dolphins** amongst the tens of thousands of **eider**. We drove round a few sites further west such as the Ríf lagoons but the thick mist made it impossible to see anything so we had something to eat and headed for some sleep.

14th June 2013

Up nice and early we did a little birding in the slightly less thick mist, some **harlequins** the pick, but we missed the king eider that was about but we only had a brief look as we had to get to Stykkishólmur to catch the ferry to Flatey island. After a feat of parking (I had squeezed the mazda into the smallest space possible) I handed over the keys, we would get off at Flatey for the day and catch the last ferry off, our car would continue and would be waiting for us at Brjánslægur further north on our arrival. The ferry crossing was still misty and as we landed on Flatey conditions did not improve. But it was warm with light winds so the conditions were pleasant for birding and we explored the island the main target being the small population of **grey phalaropes** that live on the island so we wandered about in search of them. We quickly encountered some confiding **snow buntings** that some of the residents had put food out for. The north east part of the island has a lovely little wetland called Skansmyri. Here we watched dozens of **red necked phalaropes** at our feet, and we even had to walk round them on the path, it was also rammed with **snipe** and a few breeding **ducks**.



Redshank



Kleifabui



Eider

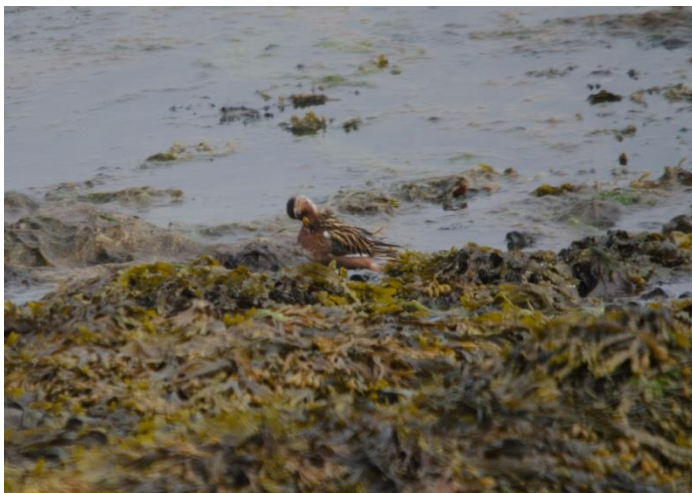


Red Necked Phalarope



Snow Bunting

Further along the coast a small cliff area had breeding **fulmar**, **black guillemot** and of course **puffins**. A beach area had some **turnstone** and a family of **oystercatchers**. Back at the marsh we had our lunch watching the birds in an amazing setting. We wandered back to the harbour exploring all the paths in search of the **grey phalaropes** without any success. After a quick drink in the shop we headed to the church for a look around and then onto the south shore where we met some other birders who had seen **grey phalaropes** there. A lone **brent goose** was on the beach as we settled down for a wait, a few mins later some Italian birders joined us and I picked up a distant **grey phalarope** which we watched intermittently through the mist for a while. The Italians left and shortly after a male **grey phalarope** landed on the shore in front of us, still visible we managed to get the Italians back for some nice views and they were very appreciative of our efforts to call them back. As we watched a female dropped in but only for a minute before it flew off inland, the male stayed for a few more mins but then flew off over our heads across the island.



Black Guillemot



Redshank



Red Necked Phalarope



Jellyfish



Brent Goose



Ringed Plover

We had another good wander round but could not locate either of them but did find a few **knot**. We headed to the ferry terminal, our ferry was late so we watched the **jellyfish** and an **eider** with 20 or so ducklings until it arrived. It was thick mist still so we had some food during the crossing but just as we arrived at Brjánslækur the skies cleared and a beautiful evening ensued or so we thought. As we headed to our destination for the evening, the famous Látrabjarg cliffs but mist once again surrounded us and again hampered viewing. This was to be very inconvenient as tonight was our night to stake out **Arctic foxes**. As we arrived at Látrabjarg which was about 40km down a gravel road the car park was very busy with people watching the **puffins**. They are very confiding sitting a few feet from you here at the furthest point west in Europe. As time drew on the crowds faded but even at midnight a few people were wandering around which was starting to frustrate me as this combined with the poor visibility would not be great conditions for seeing foxes. At 1am when more people arrived to wander around we decided to take a drive. As we passed the camp site onto the dunes two **arctic foxes** (brown form) ran across the dunes, I got the bins onto the second one before it disappeared, I was out of the car and into the dunes where they went in but they had vanished. We headed back to Látrabjarg where eventually everyone left and waited but by 4am we had no sign.

15th June 2013

At 4am I had Látrabjarg to myself and the mist finally started to clear and it was a beautiful morning, **Brünnich's guillemots** were very abundant amongst the commoner species and I spent some time watching them before heading to the campsite for some sleep. Late morning we headed north in search of food and fuel finding ourselves heading through some spectacular scenery (now that we could see it) we explored the towns and fjords of Tálknafjörður where we found dozens of adult **Glaucous gulls** and Patreksfjörður where we had some really excellent food and refuelled the car. The plans for this part of the trip were not fixed so give the lack of foxes the previous night we decided on a repeat visit to Látrabjarg for the night. We explored the area on the way to Látrabjarg and found some immature **Glaucous gulls** and all the usual common species and enjoyed the amazing views. During our exploration of the area we took the very rough



Puffins



Brünnich's guillemots



Auks



Razorbill



Látrabjarg Cliffs

track to Keflavik at the far end of the Látrabjarg cliffs which had some more amazing views. A bird circling above the cliffs caught my interest and we were quickly onto a **gyr falcon**, we hopped back in the car and drove much closer but the bird had gone and despite an extensive search we did not relocate it. We headed back to the campsite for a couple of hours sleep and then back to Látrabjarg, it was early so I explored the area again and spent plenty of time sitting and watching the **arctic skuas** annoy the **whimbrels**. The crowd waned but people refused to leave and at 1am people were still arriving to see the **puffins** we waited until 3am when we could take no more and decided to start our very long drive.

16th June 2013

As we headed off the Látrabjarg peninsular I spotted a **fox** (grey form) moving at speed, it ran across the road far ahead of us and into the dunes, I again headed off after it and I spotted it distantly in the dunes watching me but 30 seconds later it was gone, but I had a distant record shot and was much happier with the view than the previous one. Almost back on the tarmac road we stopped once again Anna had spotted yet another **fox** (brown form) much closer on the hill but it did not allow a photo before it disappeared. We were heading east towards Akureyri which with our planned stops and indirect route would take all day, the first unplanned stop was yet another **fox** this time it was close to the car and allowed some good photos as it moved away up the hillside – excellent our major target nicely in the bag we could take the rest of the holiday at a relaxed pace.



Glaucous Gulls



Kittiwake



Arctic Fox



Arctic Fox



Iceland / Glaucous Gulls



Common Seals

After a few hours we made it to the Vatnsnes peninsular here we made a few touristy stops one of note to see the Hvitserkur stack. But also a couple of stops to see some small seal colonies these were mostly **common seals** but we did see the odd single **grey seal** here and there along the coast. Our next mission was to see and **Iceland gull** in Iceland, the prime site in summer is the river mouth in Blönduós. We stopped here and managed to locate a couple with some **Glaucous gulls** on a sand bank. We made it to Akureyri and had some food including the biggest portion of fries I have ever seen and we ate them watching the **eider** and **long tailed ducks** in the lake. By now it was getting on and we headed to our rather characterless hotel (despite its amazing setting) to get an early night and a sorely needed shower after two sleepless nights in the car.

17th June 2013

Another beautiful day and we headed up to the small and picturesque town of Húsavík famed for its whale watching. We booked a trip and headed off to the far side of the bay, here we quickly located a **humpback whale** and had some nice views of it feeding, but the captain of the boat insisted in pointing the bow of the boat in the direction of every one of the 5 **humpbacks** we saw, which was very frustrating as not everyone could be on the bow.



Fortunately plenty of the whales surfaced at the side of the boat and we had some amazing views. I called out a **minke whale** but the crew ignored me then 10 mins later



Hvitserkur stack



Húsavík



Humpback Whale



Humpback Whale



White Beaked Dolphin



Humpback Whale

called out the one I was watching already and indeed I had another one but I didn't bother calling it. I called out **white beaked dolphins** which again the crew took ages to acknowledge and I had managed to get most of the watchers onto them before the boat moved towards them. In general the views on this whale watch were excellent but the crew were a bit poor. Still a very nice trip but could be a great one if they got their act together. Back on land we visited the whale museum before heading to Lake Mývatn. Here we quickly found several **Barrow's goldeneye** and lots of **scaup**. The famous Laxa river bridge had several **harlequin ducks** as well as **long tailed ducks** and a cracking drake **barrow's goldeneye** and a plague of flies which were only bearable when the odd gust of wind dispersed them. We had good views of **red breasted mergansers**, **slavonian grebes** and the commoner species of **ducks**.



We headed back to our hotel stopping at some nice pools that had breeding **divers** of both species, lots of **waders** and of course **red necked phalaropes**. We made a stop at Goðafoss a rather pleasant waterfall before turning in for the night.

18th June 2013

Yet another beautiful day and we returned to Lake Mývatn for a few hours in search of gyrfalcons but despite an extensive search we could not find any. With nothing else new we headed to the Mývatn natural baths for some relaxing in a geothermal pool – very nice and relaxing.



Scaup / Slavonian Grebe



Barrow's Goldeneye



Harlequin Duck



Long Tailed Duck



Goðafoss



Namaskaro

Next we visited the nearby Namafjall volcanic are with lots of active fumaroles and bubbling mud pools and then onto the Krafala volcano to see the lava fields and crater lake. The last stop of the day was to see Dettifoss a larger waterfall than Goðafoss, as we continued our journey eastwards a **gyr falcon** zoomed by the car but despite a quick 180 degree turn it had gone.

We detoured off the road 1 along the 901 and passed through some amazing scenery and idyllic villages before returning to road 1 but we did not encounter anything we had not seen before. At this point we entered the reindeer area as we crossed the hills to Egilsstaðir but none were seen along the way and we stopped for a bite to eat before heading to our guesthouse a little north.

19th June 2013

Yet another beautiful day as we headed north, here we encountered crèches of **pink footed geese** along the idyllic river. As we reached the coast we encountered some excellent pools containing a nice selection of **waders** and **waterbirds**. We made it to the remote village of Borgarfjörður for a quick look for the steller's eider that has been resident for well over 10 years, but even though it was present a few days before it had gone missing upriver which is apparently normal at this time of year. Some other birders we met had spent a couple of days searching for it without success.



Namaskaro



Dettifoss



Pink Footed Goose



Black Tailed Godwit



Purple Sandpiper



Arctic tern

But the harbour was teeming with birds, **eider** – naturally, **red breasted mergansers**, **harlequin ducks**, **mallard**, **black tailed godwits**, **dunlins** and a couple of **purple sandpipers**. We had a search up river for the eider but no luck but we did find a rather nice **ptarmigan**, we took a quick look at the **puffin** colony before turning south and heading back to Egilsstaðir where we had an excellent meal in the Shell Petrol station – well worth a visit.



As we continued our journey the rain started and continued as we detoured from route 1 on the 939 to Oxi in search of **reindeer**. The rain slowed a little and high on the hillside I spotted a lone **reindeer** which required digiscoping. The rain stopped and the sun returned as we arrived at Djúpivogur, where there is a nice bird reserve. The town had some sort of festival and was decorated extensively; the reserve held all the usual species but some **golden plover** showed particularly well washing in a puddle. We continued to Höfn for the night, stopping for a **reindeer** crossing the road and then noticed a small herd grazing in the fields on the other side. We arrived at Höfn checking out the nature reserve at the far end of the harbour which was basically a massive **arctic tern** colony, after some food we turned in for the night.

20th June 2013

Amazingly it was another beautiful day as we headed to Jökulsárlón, the glacial ice lagoon, stopping for a family of **whooper swans** along the way. The ice lagoon was spectacular and we took a ride in the amphibian craft through it highly recommended. Just as we were leaving we noticed a few crèches of **barnacle geese** on the coast.



Puffins



Red Throated Diver



Bakkagerði



Amazing View



Reindeer



Jökulsárlón

Our next destination was Skaftafell, here we would walk to the foot of the glacier but search the path there for Northern Green Orchids, we quickly found **coral root**, **small white** and **frog orchids** and eventually a couple of **Northern Green orchids** but all in bud bar one that was just opening. The glacier was quite spectacular but during our return walk it started to rain, only a shower, and by the time we reached **Skógafoss waterfall** it was bright and sunny again. We visited the small town of Vik and the nature reserve at Dyrhólaey, this area we found plenty of **bonxies**. The rest of the afternoon was spent driving, stopping off at various viewpoints and tourist stops including the Eyjafjallajökull volcano before arriving at Selfoss for something to eat.



Coralroot Orchid

21st June 2013

Yes the weather was again perfect for what was a very touristy day mainly to places I visited 15 years ago on my only other visit to Iceland but it was a dark cold November trip and today was the complete opposite. We arrived at Þingvellir which was Iceland's historical parliament and lies on the continental divide. We had made it before the tourist busses so only a few people were around and it made what is a beautiful place to visit even better. Here we located a singing **wren**, scarce in Iceland. Next stop was the tourist area of Geysir to see the famous Strokkur geyser and associated geothermal pools. It was quite busy in the visitor centre but the geothermal area was not too bad. Ice cream was in order and even a medium was very large but I still managed to finish it.



Eyjafjallajökull volcano



Þingvellir



Strokkur geyser

We stumbled on a couple of **Northern Green orchids** that were in flower right in the geothermal area. It was then the short journey to Gullfoss a rather spectacular waterfall then onto Reykjavik. The first stop was the hillside that contains the Perlan, here we quickly found some **rabbits** introduced to the Reykjavik area. We checked in at our hotel and then wandered into town to see the sights. The lake held plenty of common birds and the first **feral pigeons** of the trip. We had a couple of beers the first of the trip and a hotdog at the famous stand. After a good walk round seeing the sights we went to an excellent fish and chip restaurant to finish the evening.



22nd June 2013

Our last day and we headed directly to Grindavik where a bearded seal had been present off and on for the last couple of weeks. I spoke to a local and they said that it was the only seal present and usually in the harbour. We were quickly at the harbour and had a glimpse of a seal fishing but after getting a better look it was a **common seal**. A thorough search of the area did not produce any other seals so we headed off to see some more geothermal areas at Gunnuhver and then onto the Reykjanestá peninsular.



Redwing



Redpoll



Rabbit



Gunnuhver



Turk Cains



Arctic Skua

Here we could see the island of Eldey (large **gannet** colony) can be seen, here a large statue of a great auk looks across to the island where in 1844 the last great auks in the world were killed. A quick visit to the Bridge between continents where the European plate meets the American plate. Time for lunch in Keflavik where we visited the Giantess a massive giant sculpture in a grotto. We toured the area around Gardur but did not find anything of note but visited a few nice places. The next visit was to Keilir a hyaloclastite mountain and then a quick diversion along to Vogar where we encountered a couple of **Arctic skuas** which showed nicely and finally a **snipe** that perched up long enough for me to get a photo. Time for some food and then to find our hotel for the night.



23rd June 2013

We had a 6.45am uneventful flight home.



Whooper Swans



Bonxie



Lesser Black Backed Gull



Giantess



Eider

BIRDS - 67

Red Throated Diver	Great Northern Diver	Slavonian Grebe
Fulmar	Gannet	Cormorant
Shag	Whooper Swan	Pink Footed Goose
Greylag Goose	Barnacle Goose	Brent Goose
Mallard	Gadwall	Wigeon
Teal	Scaup	Tufted Duck
Eider	Common Scoter	Long Tailed Duck
Harlequin Duck	Barrow's Goldeneye	Red Breasted Merganser
Goosander	Gyr Falcon	Ptarmigan
Oystercatcher	Ringed Plover	Golden Plover
Knot	Purple Sandpiper	Turnstone
Dunlin	Redshank	Black Tailed Godwit
Whimbrel	Snipe	Grey Phalarope
Red Necked Phalarope	Great Skua	Arctic Skua
Black headed Gull	Common Gull	Herring Gull
Lesser Black Backed Gull	Great Black Backed Gull	Kittiwake
Glaucous Gull	Iceland Gull	Arctic Tern
Puffin	Black Guillemot	Guillemot
Brünnich's Guillemot	Razorbill	Feral Pigeon
Meadow Pipit	White Wagtail	Wren
Wheatear	Redwing	Raven
Starling	House Sparrow	Icelandic Redpoll
Snow Bunting		

MAMMALS - 8

Grey Seal	Common Seal	White Beaked Dolphin
Minke Whale	Humpback Whale	Rabbit
Arctic Fox	Reindeer	

MISC - 6

Coralroot orchid	Frog Orchid	Small White Orchid
Northern Green Orchid	White-tailed bumblebee	Small Garden Bumblebee

notes

Iceland is easy to get round but we did buy a road atlas once we arrived to make sure we knew where the petrol stations and other facilities were. It was easy to stop almost anywhere to look at wildlife, the roads away from Reykjavik are very quiet. The wildlife is generally confiding particularly when using the car as a hide.

All the people were very helpful and all spoke excellent English, everywhere we went had English menus and all the tourist information notices etc. are in Icelandic and English. Fuel costs the same in every petrol station across the country so even in the remotest station we were not penalised. Almost all the petrol stations are pay at pump with credit cards and we did have some cards that would not work on these but would work in the shop itself, this seems to be a common issue and you can purchase prepaid cards from the petrol stations to avoid this. Generally petrol stations have hot food available ranging from snacks and burgers to full blown restaurants which were excellent.

Prices are similar to those in London for fuel and food, alcohol was much more expensive and accommodation ranged widely but was not more than anywhere else I have been in Western Europe.

We did not see any birdwatchers away from the main sites but at the main sites there were a few around to swap sightings etc.

Icelandic rarity news is available on the following website which also has plenty of info on sites and species

<https://notendur.hi.is/~yannk/birdnews.html>

