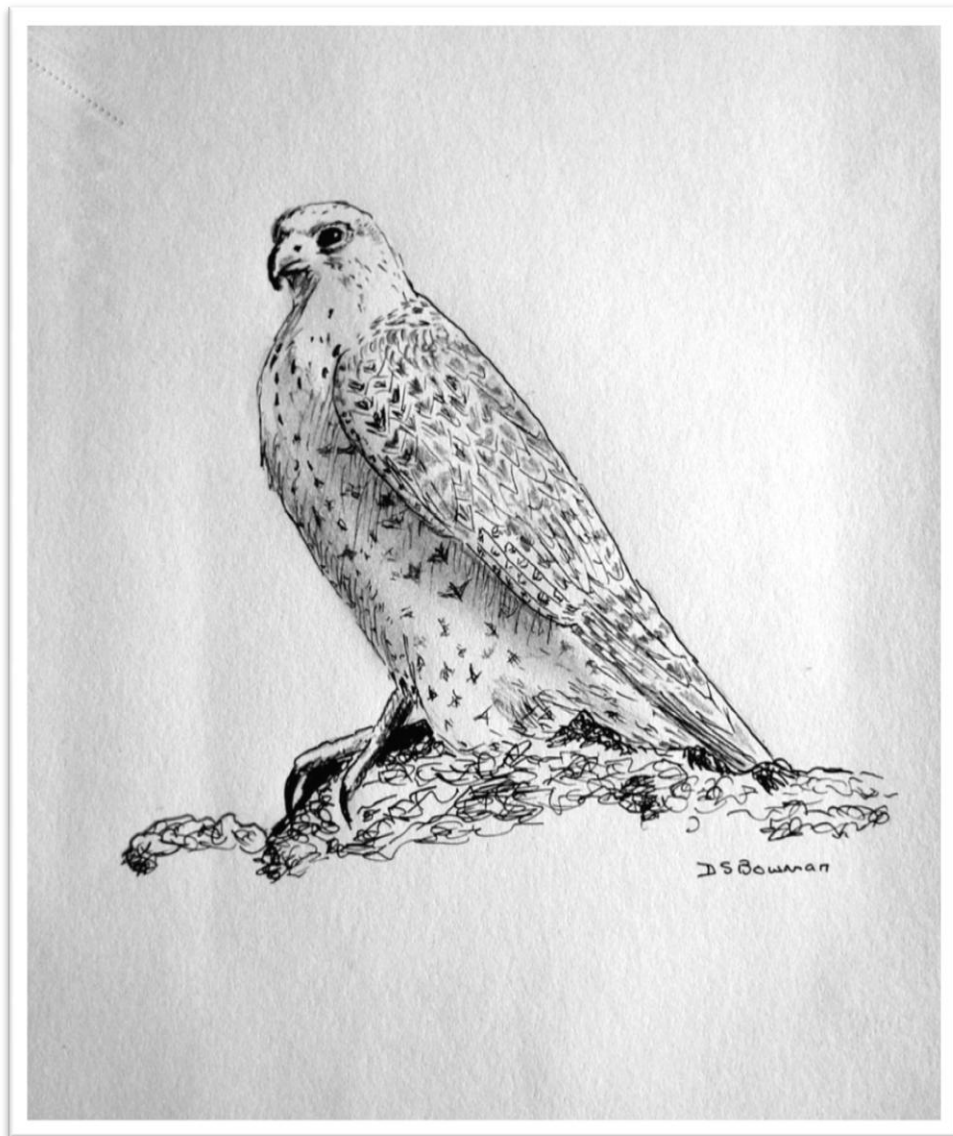


# Iceland

*Gyr Falcons, Orcas and Arctic Foxes*

*4<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> July 2012*



*By David Bowman*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This trip was a long-awaited visit to Iceland to try and track down Gyr Falcon, as well as to enjoy the spectacle of millions of breeding seabirds plus waders galore. Participants were the usual suspects: Roger Benbow, Les Colley, Tony Ormond, Kenny MacNiffe, Mike Miles, Dave Steel, plus debutant Stephen Walters and myself.

Flights, which were excellent, were with Icelandair and cost £269 per person return, flying from Manchester to Keflavik, which is about forty-five minutes from Reykjavik. We booked a ten-seater minibus from Iceland Car Hire at a cost of c. £105 per person, which worked well. Driving is an absolute joy, with empty roads and vistas to take your breath away. We tried to keep accommodation costs down by booking mainly into rural guesthouses, rather than hotels, which worked out at roughly £45 per person per night, including breakfast, sharing twin rooms. Believe everything you hear about Iceland being expensive, however. A one course meal, without a drink costs about £22 and a small beer £6 (as for wine, don't even go there!). Needless to say, for once we kept our consumption to a minimum and even had a night without any beer – unprecedented. It was all worth it though, as the birding is truly wonderful and the landscapes at least as good.

While Iceland has a very limited avifauna, with just over seventy breeding species, it is an excellent place for rarities during passage periods. Most British birders go to Iceland for that quartet of specialities – Gyr Falcon, Harlequin Duck, Brunnich's Guillemot and Barrow's Goldeneye – and we were no different. The Iceland Birding web-site (below) is a mine of information and also runs a rarity information service. Our intent, though, was to see as many of the breeding species as possible in a week. We also wanted to get in some whale-watching, if time allowed. Iceland Birding website: <https://notendur.hi.is/yannk/indexeng.html>



*The Snaefellsjokul Glacier, part-visible at Arnarstapi*

## ITINERARY

**4<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

### **Manchester – Keflavik – Snojfell Hostel at Arnarstapi on the Snaefesllness Penninsula**

After the usual welcomes, introductions and banter we boarded our flight and were underway, pretty well on time. As the flight was under-booked we had plenty of room to spread out and take advantage of the friendly service on board. Soon we were looking down on Iceland's numerous volcanic peaks and dropping down into Keflavik, arriving at 3.00 pm local time. Car pick-up was just a few minutes' walk from the small terminal and Kenny and I went off to sort this out. We were impressed with the quality of the vehicle, brand new and spotless – though not for long. Off we went, Kenny at the wheel confident as he'd driven the route already, many times, on Google street view. Given his local knowledge we were all able to relax and enjoy a bonus tour of Selfoss before swinging north-west towards toward the Snaefesllnes Penninsula.

Immediate impressions were of wide open spaces, quiet roads and clouds of Arctic Terns everywhere. The further we got from Reykjavik, and particularly beyond Borganes, the more dramatic the scenery became. Volcanic cones and eroded ridges on the inland side, with the sea away to our left and scores of road-side pools, which meant frequent stops to check them out. Great Northern and Red-throated Divers, Whooper Swans, "real" Greylags, Arctic and Great Skuas, Goosanders, Oystercatchers, Ringed Plovers, Golden Plovers, Dunlins, Common Snipes, Whimbrels, Black-tailed Godwits and Common Redshanks were regulars on or around most of the pools, while thousands of Arctic Terns provided both back-drop and sound-track. Eventually, we had to tear ourselves away and make tracks towards our Hostel at Arnarstapi. The scenery became ever more impressive as the white-domed top of the Snaefellsjokul Glacier started to dominate the western horizon. It didn't seem to be getting any closer, though, so it was foot down and press on, in the hope of being in time to get something to eat. At 9.00 pm we pulled onto the parking area at the Snojfell Hostel, half an hour after they stopped serving.



*Sitting outside the Snojfell Hostel at Arnarstapi*

The staff of the Hostel couldn't have been more helpful and phoned through to a local hotel which served until 9.30 pm and booked us a table. Tired and hungry we jumped back in the van, Steve at the wheel and sped off. We were soon livened up when Steve decided to demonstrate his rallying skills with a last-split-second handbrake-turn on a gravel track's hairpin bend! The hotel was nice, with stunning views over the sea and we had our first introduction to Icelandic prices, though the food was excellent – almost as good as the beer. Feeling better, we went back to the Snjofell to register and decant our stuff before taking advantage of the never-fading light and getting down to those sea cliffs.

The Hostel itself makes a great birding base. Rooms are plain but comfortable, bunk-house style with four single beds to a room. The restaurant is cosy and friendly and the food excellent. The surroundings are glorious, with flower meadows full of breeding waders leading down, just five minutes' walk away, to some of the best sea-bird cliffs in Iceland, with Arctic Terns breed on every gravelled surface. Even better, the wilder cliffs at the western end of the peninsula are only a leisurely hour's drive away.

<http://www.hringhotels.is/snjofell/rooms.aspx>



***Whimbrel outside the Snjofell Hostel***

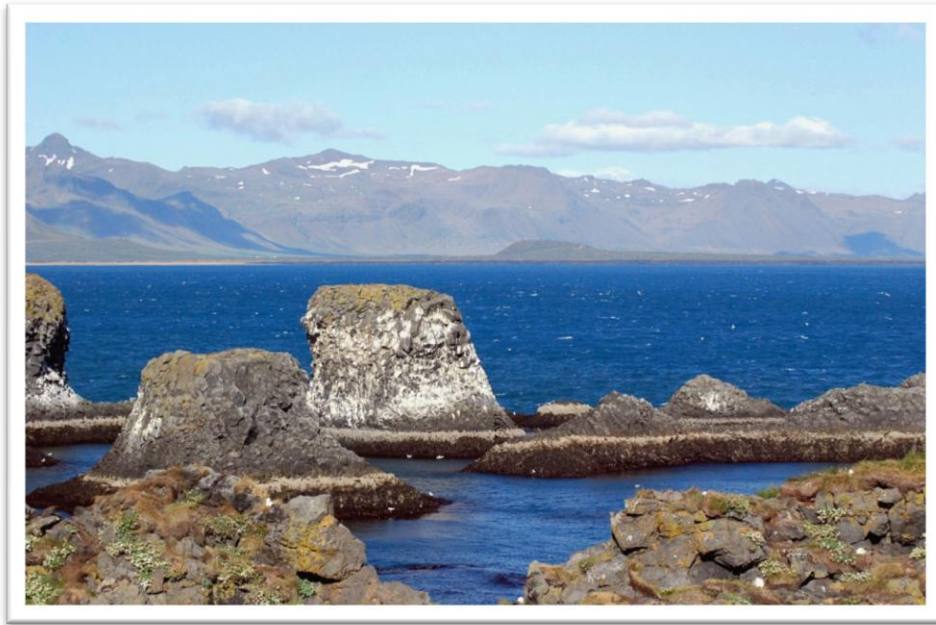
Wandering down to the sea cliffs we drew the attention of breeding Arctic Terns, Whimbrels, Ringed Plovers, Common Redshanks and Black-tailed Godwits. Looking out from various vantage points we saw countless thousands of Kittiwakes, Fulmars, Arctic Terns, Gannets, Razorbills, Common Guillemots, Glaucous Gulls, Common Eiders, Shags, Lesser Black-backs, Great Black-backs and Puffins. Best of all, close in on the sea and later found roosting on some rocks close in a cove, were four female Harlequin Ducks. Further out, three Harbour Porpoises were a nice sight of our first cetaceans of the trip, though hopefully not our last. Then, bed was calling, so a final beer and off we went, nodding off to the song of a Redwing on the roof.



**5<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

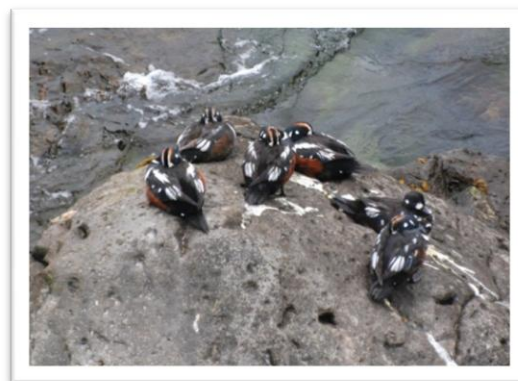
**Arnarstapi – Svortuloft – Blonduos**

Ever ambitious, today's plan was to re-visit the cliffs in front of the hostel before breakfast, then drive out west to the wildest part of the Snaefellsnes Peninsula to see the breeding cliffs at Svortuloft, which hold breeding Brunnich's Guillemot. After that we'd make the long, half-day drive north-east, over the Snjofell Pass, through wild valleys and around the northern fjords which poke inland from the Arctic Ocean, to reach our hotel in Blonduos. This was our stopping off point en route to Lake Myvatn, the premier birding spot in Iceland and our best chance of locating Gyr Falcon.



*Looking east from the sea cliffs at Arnarstapi*

The local sea cliffs really delivered the goods early on. We found a group of 12 Harlequin Ducks, mainly drakes, in the same cove as before. Just as exciting was Mike's find, languidly pointing out that he'd "got some big fins" in his 'scope, which naturally turned out to be four Orcas. We spent a good half hour watching the pod, led by a massive male, hunting actively before reluctantly heading off for breakfast. This, by the way, was excellent, taken at the tables outside, watching terns, waders and gulls milling round in a stunning setting.



So, off towards Svortuloft, down a narrow, winding road, with breeding waders to all sides. Part way there we saw a hand-written sign saying “Dead Whale”, with an arrow pointing down a rough track towards the sea. Following it we came to a shingly beach and, sure enough, there was a large, dead Sperm Whale. Bonus sightings included a pair of Snow Buntings, Northern Wheatears, stunning summer plumage Golden Plovers and a fly-by Iceland Gull.



*Dead Sperm Whale at Snaefellsness*

Eventually we returned to the peninsula road and headed further west until we reached the winding gravel road to the cliffs at Svortuloft. You can park at the lighthouse car park and are then right on top of the cliffs. Immediately scanning the auk colonies we soon found small groups of Brunnich's Guillemots among the Common Guillemots (including a few bridled), Razorbills, Black Guillemots and Puffins, along with masses of gulls and terns. Twelve White-beaked Dolphins were an added bonus.



*Brunnich's Guillemots at Svortuloft*

After a very productive hour or so the prospect of breaking new ground pulled us back to the van and we were soon making good speed, back towards Arnarstapi, on to Borganes and then up through the high valleys of the Snjofell pass. Pressing on we crossed the inland edges of several fjords. Driving on through some spectacular valleys, with razor edged ridges on both sides, we stopped to take a break and check out the flower-rich, boggy valley bottom. This gave us our first Red-necked Phalaropes, which were clearly breeding close-by, as they flew round us calling and distracting.

Our final birding stop was at a shingle spit jutting out into a fjord, just west of Blonduos. Waders were common, with 350 Dunlin feeding along the edge and auks and terns were streaming past. Finally, we arrived at the Hotel Blonduos, a pleasant if undistinguished “business” hotel, close to where the River Blanda enters the Arctic Ocean. A quick brush up and then I dashed down to a local bar to negotiate a time for dinner. The owner was then amenable to me borrowing eight of her chairs and setting them up on the river bank, each with a beer, for a final hours birding before dinner and then an early bed. During dinner an item came on the TV news, showing a Polar Bear, which had swum to land on the coast just east of Blonduos (an increasingly common occurrence due to the melting ice cap in summer). It would have been the twitch of a lifetime, except that the news then sadly showed the authorities shooting it! Abiding memories were of sitting on the river bank, sipping a beer and watching loads of waders and terns coming to roost on a shingle bank while Arctic Skuas patrolled the river and breeding Ringed Plovers and masses of Greylags with chicks occupied the open ground behind us.



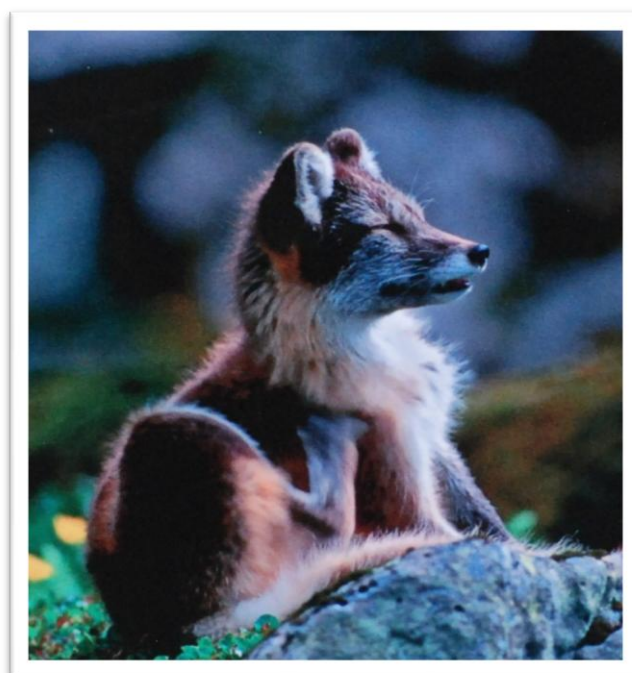
*The Mussolini twins invade Blonduos*



**6<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

**Blonduos – Dummuborgir, Lake Myvatn**

After an early start, including a bit of pre-breakfast birding, we made good time towards Lake Myvatn, eyes peeled for the Gyr Falcons which breed in good numbers in the wilder valleys. The Icelandic population is estimated at four hundred pairs, so the chances looked good. While there were many good birds en route, the biggest thrill came when Dave Steel, riding shotgun, shouted “Arctic Fox at the side of the road!” Only Kenny, who was alongside him, had also managed to see it. We couldn’t stop, as a car was behind us, so I eventually found a turning place and not very optimistically, crawled back. For a while it seemed as if the chance was gone till a small, dark canine suddenly looked up out of the long grass, stared for a moment and then bounded away across a meadow. A stunning view of this scarce Arctic predator, and with everyone managing to see it, it remains a trip highlight. Soon we were stopping for lunch in Akureyri, a pleasant town in a spectacular setting at the end of a long fjord, where Arctic cruise ships regularly anchor.



*Arctic Fox*

Less than two hours after leaving Akureyri we were approaching Lake Myvatn and dozens of small pools and an increasingly volcanic landscape were characteristic. The pools held Slavonian Grebes, Greater Scaup, Red-throated and Great Northern Divers, Whooper Swans plus our first Barrow’s Goldeneyes, along with many waders. Consulting our map, we then decided to take a short detour to visit the famous Gudafoss waterfall. This was spectacular, though slightly touristy, so we didn’t stay too long. Soon, the lunar landscape of Lake Myvatn appeared and we had a quick stop on the Laxa River, where Harlequin Ducks were immediately evident. Then, to our hotel and some lakeside birding. The Dimmuborgir Guesthouse is ideally situated for birding the Myvatn area. Accommodation is in small cabins, while the main building has a pleasant breakfast room overlooking the lake, so you can watch Barrow’s Goldeneyes, Slavonian Grebes and Scaup while having a very nice breakfast. The hotel lies in the middle of the extensive Dimmuborgir lava field. This rugged, lunar landscape was formed when hot lava hit the lake and cooled rapidly. Just to finish off



what is an already dramatic setting, a huge volcanic cone rears up behind the hotel, dominating everything. <http://www.dimmuborgir.is/page/en/startpage/>



***Looking over Lake Myvatn from the terrace of the Dimmuborgir Guesthouse***

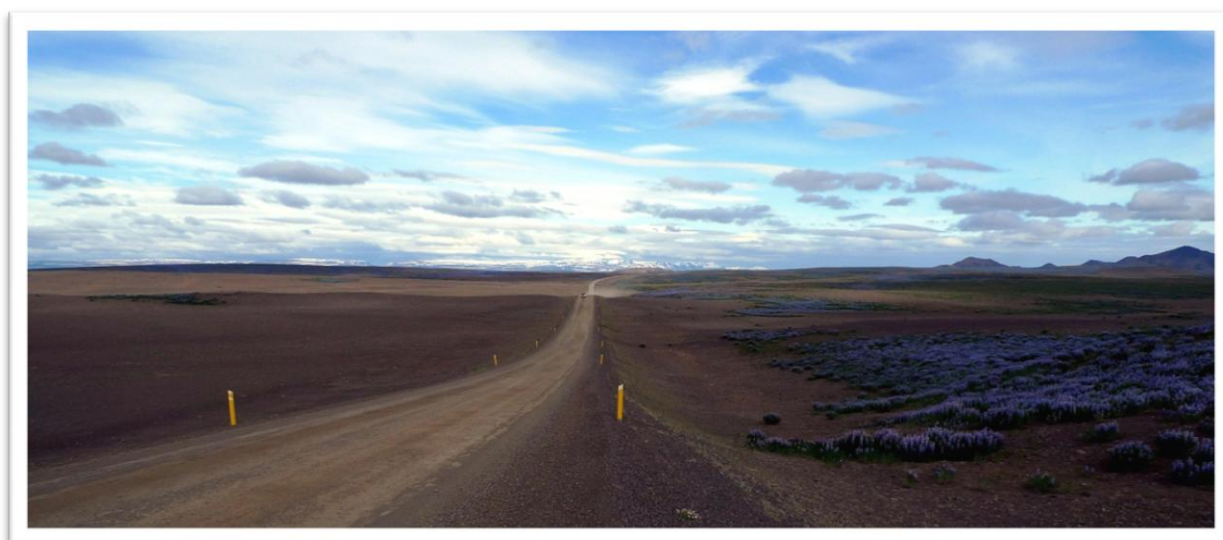
After dumping our stuff, we set off for some brilliant birding, with the main impression being of overwhelming numbers of waterbirds; Whooper Swans, Greylag Geese, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Tufted Duck, Scaup, Common Eider, Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-throated and Great Northern Divers, Slavonian Grebe, plus loads of waders including Red-necked Phalaropes at very close range. Still, the desire to make sure that we got to grips with Gyr Falcon began to take over and after getting some local information from one of the hotel staff, we set off on the hunt.

Not far from the hotel there is a hill-top café which looks out over extensive lava fields. Gyrs apparently fly in over the lava field, from a nearby nest site, en route to hunting grounds around the lake. The café has a view-point which was where we immediately began setting up our scopes, prepared for a long vigil in the never-fading light. No sooner had Mike set up his scope than he focussed on a "white blob" on top of a towering lava formation. Unbelievably, it was a massive, white phase female. After watching for a while, we determined to get closer views and set off to negotiate our way along a maze of footpaths which traverse the lava field. Even more unbelievably, she left her perch and flew to perch close by, giving the kind of views we never really expected to get. Eventually, we left her in peace and returned to the viewpoint, where Dave Steel managed to get a further view of her gliding between the lava columns and landing not far away. It was a fabulous end to the birding day, which we rounded off with pizza and beer.

7<sup>th</sup> July 2012

### **Myvatn- Husavik-Myvatn**

After an early breakfast and some more lakeside birding, we set off intending to do some whale-watching at Husavik. The road takes you up and across some high, wide open volcanic plains, where the reddish soil is illuminated by wide swathes of purple Arctic Lupins. We had been driving for a while when I noticed a crag off to the side of the road, which, in the UK, I would have guaranteed to hold nesting Peregrines. I suggested we make a short stop to check it out. Scanning the massive crag, I spotted white droppings, indicative of a nest site, swung the scope in that direction and immediately saw the hunched shape of a big, grey phase female Gyr busily feeding young! We then spent a fabulous hour, lying in the grass in the sunshine, watching the comings and goings at the eyrie. Three young were present and at one point the female flew off and made a desultory pass at three Ptarmigan. Then Tony's sharp ears picked up the young calling and then a stunning, snow white male flew in, circling fulmar-like over the crag. Eventually, we had to tear ourselves away – once we had managed to retrieve Les from his botanic escapades – and set off for Husavik.



### ***On the road to Husavik***

Pressing on to Husavik, we arrived to find it a pretty little harbour town. It is the centre of the whale-watching industry in Iceland because of the shallowness of the enclosed bay on which it sits. This attracts a variety of whales and other cetaceans, which come into the bay to feed. Even as we were walking along looking for somewhere to grab some lunch, our scanning of the bay gave us glimpses of whales blowing and sounding. Originally, we had intended paying for a boat trip but, over a very pleasant lunch at a harbour-side café, we decided instead to find a good watch-point and do some land-based watching. We soon found a good headland on the far side of the bay and set ourselves up for a good couple of hours of rewarding whale-watching. By the time we'd finished we'd had extensive views of small numbers of Minke and Humpbacked Whales as well as more White-beaked Dolphins. A magnificent experience and one none of us would ever tire of. The birding had also been excellent, with lots of seabirds and gulls and an unseasonal adult Iceland Gull picked out among the many Glaucous Gulls. As an added bonus, Tony managed to find us an occupied Redwing nest, a first for all of us. Then, homewards, with just a brief stop for the Gyrs, some more lakeside birding,

pizza and beer – and then, for some of us (ahem!), a rather raucous late night sitting out on the terrace of our cabin, celebrating a truly wonderful day and drinking in that surreal, midnight sun.

**8<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

### **Myvatn – the North-eastern Valleys – Mayvatn**

This was one of those fortuitous days when a change of plan pays dividends. We had intended to spend the day around the shores of Myvatn, enjoying the wealth of wildfowl and waders. Iceland is such a beautiful country, however, that the need to break new ground once again got the better of us. I'd read about the high, remote valleys, to the east of Myvatn, where huge numbers of Pink-footed Geese breed. I'd no sooner mentioned this than we were in the van and on our way! We made a quick stop at remarkable area of geothermal activity, with geysers bubbling away and steam rising everywhere.



### ***Geysers near Myvatn***

We then took Route 1, heading through some stunning terrain of endless, mossy plains over which volcanic peaks towered. We stopped by a small river and then wandered across the plain, flushing breeding Dunlins, Golden Plovers and Ptarmigan. It was the kind of landscape which enticed you to just keep walking to the far horizon but in the end we had to move on. After a pleasant lunch stop at a little café/camp ground the scenery started to change as we climbed higher and higher across barren lava fields, with immense views all around. Then we emerged above the kind of valley I'd read about. Wide swathes of green, dotted with endless small pools, disappearing into the far distance. Stopping the van to scan, we immediately saw large crèches of Pink-footed Goose chicks, milling around the distant pools below us. Leaving the van, we scrambled down a steep rocky slope to explore one of the most impressive habitats I've ever seen.



Breeding Dunlins, Golden Plovers and a single Purple Sandpiper flushed as we walked through the valley bottom. Pink-footed Geese and their young were everywhere, with smaller numbers of Whooper Swans present, too. Great and Arctic Skuas cruised round the pools, looking for the main chance, while a female Long-tailed duck with young slid away into cover. Eventually, after an hour so, we had to reluctantly pull ourselves away but on the amble back to the van came across the plucked carcase of an adult Pink-footed Goose. The distinctive, triangular notches in the breast-bone indicated that it had fallen prey to one of the local Gyr Falcons. Climbing back up the rocky scree to the car a Ringed Plover flushed off a nest and a male Snow Bunting gave close views.



### *En route for the High Valleys*

Homeward bound, Kenny persuaded us to make a detour to see the magnificent Detifoss waterfall. This has the highest water volume passing over of any European waterfall. In some ways the detour was worthwhile, as it really is spectacular, but in other ways it wasn't! The track which leads to Detifoss from Route 1 was the worst we'd driven on, heavily corrugated and setting up a heavy vibration through the van. By the time we reached Detifoss the sky had clouded over and the temperature had started to drop. Still it was a magnificent spectacle.



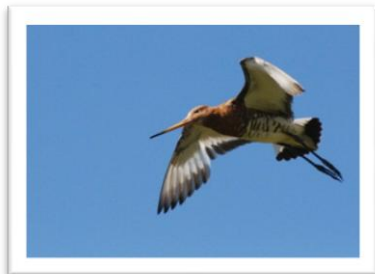


Having drunk our fill of Detifoss, food and drink were calling, so off we set along that long, heavily corrugated track. With the van vibrating fit to burst, there were only two choices. Keep going at a slow speed or go flat out and see if that would smooth out the vibrations. Against my better judgement but injudiciously encouraged by my van-mates, I went for the flat out option. Nearly made it, too! We were within sight of smooth tarmac when one of the rear tyres blew out. It is at times like this that Roger swings smoothly into action, ably abetted by captain's mate Mike. It was also educative to learn that tyre dealer Steve had never changed a tyre! Things were soon sorted, though there was a tinge of financial gloom at the possible cost of both tyre and wheel, as both were knackered. Back at base after a nice (if expensive!) meal and things were soon looking up again before we finally fell into bed, to dream about those wonderful High Valleys.

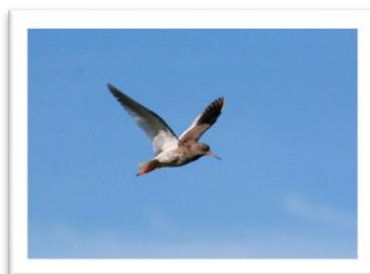
**8<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

### **Myvatn – Arnarstapi on the Snaefellsness Peninsula**

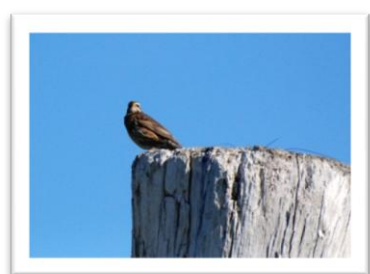
Today we faced a very long haul from Myvatn, back to our first hotel at Arnarstapi. In the end it was well worth it, as we made good time and the peninsula is just so dramatic and bird rich. We spent the afternoon and early evening birding the sea-cliffs and meadows and just drinking in the beauty of the place. Among the thousands of more common birds we managed to locate a King Eider, skulking at the base of the sea-cliffs. We ate in the hostel, where the food was excellent and even scraped up enough money for a few beers.



***Black-tailed Godwit***



***Redshank***



***Redwing***

**10<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

### **Arnarstapi – Svortuloft Cliffs – Bildudalur – Reykjavik**

A quick hours birding, along the cliffs, before breakfast and a reluctant farewell to Arnarstapi. All the usual sea-birds and breeding waders in amazing numbers, set against the most dramatic of backdrops. Species included: Glaucous Gulls, Black Guillemots, Harlequin Ducks, Common Eiders, Northern Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Gannets, Puffins, Shags, Whimbrels, Redshanks, Ringed Plovers, Black-tailed Godwits, Arctic Skuas, Great Skuas, Black-headed Gulls, Common Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Herring Gulls, Great Black-backed Gulls, Arctic Terns, Common Guillemots, Razorbills, Rock Doves/Feral Pigeons, Meadow Pipits, White Wagtails, Redwings, Northern Wheatears and Ravens. As ever, the abiding memory is of the sheer volume of birds and how approachable many of them are.



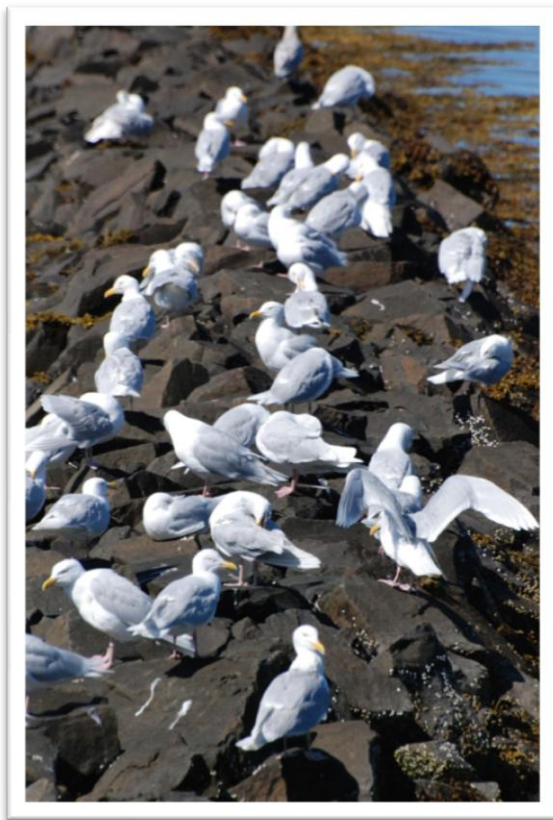
*Northern Fulmar at Arnarstapi*



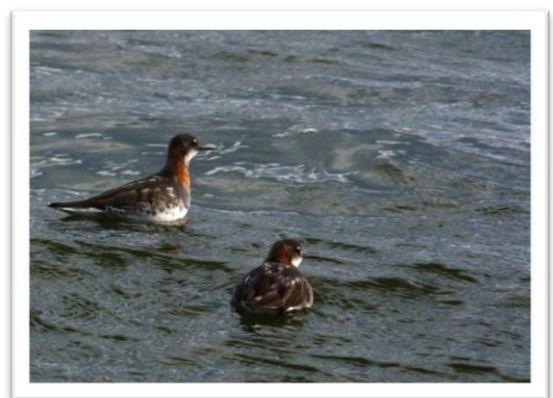
*Kittiwake roost, Arnarstapi*



The drive from Arnarstapi, down the southern side of the Snaefellsness Peninsula, to the huge seabird breeding cliffs at Svortuloft is one of the great birding drives. With the sea crashing on one side, volcanos and a glacier rearing on the other, the air full of Arctic Terns and breeding waders running and flushing at the side of the van, it really is special. Once at the cliffs we took our last looks at the Brunnich's Guillemots among the masses of Razorbills, Puffins, Common and Bridled Guillemots. Then it was time for the return drive to Reykjavik, detouring along the northern side of Snaefellsness via Bildudalur. This provided us with the last of Iceland's many surprises. As we turned round the end of the peninsula, the scenery became more and more beautiful. Huge, weathered, inland cliffs and startling volcanic cones became ever more dramatic. The little road hugs the coast and then emerges by some pretty coastal lagoons. Scoping these we were stunned to count 98 Red-necked Phalaropes and 67 Glaucous Gulls on one of the pools.



*Glaucous Gulls, volcanic cone and Red-necked Phalaropes at Bildudalur*



So, that was a fine end to the birding part of the trip and it was foot down and on to Reykjavik. We were booked in to the Arctic Comfort Hotel, which, it transpired when we finally found it, was a modern hotel in an unprepossessing area a bit like an industrial estate. Still, it met our needs, particularly as the beers were large and by Icelandic standards, relatively cheap. There was then a pleasant interlude, sitting outside the hotel, drinking and chatting to some locals. Kenny and I decided to try and head off trouble at the pass with the car hire firm, over the damaged wheel and tyre, so I concocted a letter, which was half conciliatory and half threatening, which we planned to post through the letter box with the keys when we dropped the car off in the morning.

Then there was division in the group! Some wanted to stay in the hotel drinking before walking down the road to a local restaurant. Others (mainly Steve, I think! Or was it me?) wanted to see the glories of Reykjavik. Somehow, Steve's faction won out and led its reluctant followers along several deserted streets in search of a bus stop. Following some local advice (I stopped a local and asked if he spoke English. He grinned and said "Of course! Don't you speak Icelandic?") we waited at the specified stop for the specified bus, got on, tried to pay and were met with blank looks from the driver till a kind young man came and bailed us out. The bus then turned right instead of left and headed for the outskirts of Reykjavik, eventually dropping us at some desolate bus terminus. How we laughed! Eventually, with Mike increasingly looking at his watch, aware of my promise to prevent him from turning into a pumpkin, we were guided to the right bus, which set off for the city centre. I have to say that downtown Reykjavik looks really pretty from a bus but somehow we didn't manage to get off till it was a distant dream. We then fell into a sort of cowboy bar, ate, drank and then traipsed back to the hotel, having had one of those inimitable moments, which characterise every trip! A last beer or two for some of us and then bed.

**11<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

### **Reykjavik – Keflavik Airport**

Up in the early hours and out before first light, which is just as well as we seemed determined to tour some of Reykjavik's more intriguing industrial estates, before eventually stumbling across the airport. Took the van back, along with its covering letter (the outcome was a good one, as Kenny's credit card was never charged for the defunct wheel or tyre) boarded our flight, which went smoothly and arrived back at Manchester on time. We always say that the most recent trip was the best one and we felt the same about Iceland. Huge numbers of birds, including some very special ones, extremely friendly people, landscapes without compare, empty roads and the very best of company. What more could we want? We'll have to do it again sometime. Oh, we are – the Gambia in March 2013 !!





## **Bird List**

**(b) = Icelandic breeding bird**

<b>Species</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>
1 Whooper Swan(b)	Seen daily at all suitable wetlands. Good numbers breeding in the higher and more remote areas
2. Pink-footed Goose (b)	High numbers present, with many young, in the High Valleys
3. Greylag Goose (b)	Common everywhere e.g in Blonduos where crèches of young milled around in the village streets.
4. Eurasian Wigeon (b)	Present at all suitable wetlands.
5. Gadwall (b)	Uncommon but seen daily at Myvatn.
6. Eurasian Teal (b)	Seen daily at Myvatn.
7. Mallard (b)	Very common everywhere.
8. Northern Pintail (b)	Scarce, with singles on two dates at Myvatn.
9. Northern Shoveler (b)	Scarce, with just two drakes recorded at Myvatn on 5 <sup>th</sup> July.
10. Tufted Duck (b)	Very common at all suitable wetlands.
11. Common Pochard	A rarity. Dave Steel and I watched a drake, feeding with Tufted Ducks, on 4 <sup>th</sup> July, on one of the Snaefellsness roadside lagoons. At the time we weren't aware that less than 250 had been previously recorded.
12. Greater Scaup (b)	Small numbers daily around Myvatn.
13. Common Eider (b)	Common everywhere, coastally.
14. King Eider	An Icelandic rarity, with just over 1,000 previous records. One was on the sea below the cliffs at Arnarstapi on 9 <sup>th</sup> July.
15. Harlequin Duck (b)	Up to a dozen on the sea and roosting at the base of the cliffs at Arnarstapi, on several dates. Common on the Laxa River at Myvatn.
16. Long-tailed Duck (b)	A female with young on a pool in the High Valleys on 8 <sup>th</sup> July was the only sighting.
17. Common Scoter (b)	Just one sighting on a pool in the High Valleys on 8 <sup>th</sup> July.
18. Barrow's Goldeneye (b)	A common breeder around Myvatn.
19. Red-breasted Merganser (b)	Daily at Myvatn.

20. <i>Goosander (b)</i>	<i>Only one record, on 4<sup>th</sup> July, at Snaefellsness.</i>
21. <i>Rock Ptarmigan (b)</i>	<i>A total of seven on three dates, at Myvatn, at the Gyr Falcon cliff en route to Husavik and in the High Valleys.</i>
22. <i>Red-throated Diver (b)</i>	<i>Common on all wetlands and present on the Laxa River.</i>
23. <i>Great Northern Diver (b)</i>	<i>Small numbers daily at all suitable wetlands.</i>
24. <i>Slavonian Grebe (b)</i>	<i>A common breeder around Myvatn, with several nests observed, including one on the pool in front of the Dimmuborgir Guesthouse.</i>
25. <i>Northern Fulmar (b)</i>	<i>Extremely common on the seabird cliffs of Snaefellsness.</i>
26. <i>Northern Gannet (b)</i>	<i>Small numbers regularly off-shore during all sea-watches.</i>
27. <i>European Shag (b)</i>	<i>Common at Snaefellsness.</i>
28. <i>Merlin (b)</i>	<i>Three sightings, on 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> July, all at or en route to Myvatn.</i>
29. <i>Gyr Falcon (b)</i>	<i>Seven individuals in total. A single white phase female at the Dimmuborgir Lava Field, Myvatn, on 6<sup>th</sup> July. A grey phase female and white phase male feeding three young between Myvatn and Husavik on 7<sup>th</sup> and one carrying prey which flew in front of our cabin at Dimmuborgir on the same date.</i>
30. <i>Eurasian Oystercatcher (b)</i>	<i>A common breeder throughout.</i>
31. <i>Ringed Plover (b)</i>	<i>A common breeder throughout.</i>
32. <i>European Golden Plover (b)</i>	<i>A common breeder throughout, with an occupied nest discovered at Snaefellsness.</i>
33. <i>Purple Sandpiper (b)</i>	<i>The only record was of one flushed in suitable breeding habitat in the High Valleys.</i>
34. <i>Dunlin (b)</i>	<i>Small numbers of breeding birds were observed at Snaefellsness and in the High Valleys.</i>
35. <i>Common Snipe (b)</i>	<i>As the name suggests, the drumming of Snipe was a common sound at both Snaefellsness and Myvatn.</i>
36. <i>Whimbrel (b)</i>	<i>A common breeder throughout, with several adults distracting in front of the Snjofeld Hostel at Arnarstapi.</i>
37. <i>Black-tailed Godwit (b)</i>	<i>Another common breeder, with distracting and displaying adults all around the hostel at Arnarstapi, for example.</i>
38. <i>Common Redshank (b)</i>	<i>A common breeder throughout with numbers displaying in the meadows at Arnarstapi and at Myvatn.</i>
39. <i>Turnstone</i>	<i>Not known to breed on Iceland, though common on passage, one straggler was located on the river at Blonduos on 5<sup>th</sup> July.</i>

40. Red-necked Phalarope (b)	Abundant in the right habitat, both at Snaefellsness and Myvatn. Highest counts were of 50 at Myvatn on 8 <sup>th</sup> July and 98 at Snaefellsness on 9 <sup>th</sup> July.
41. Arctic Skua (b)	Regular at all sites both at inland breeding sites and off-shore
42. Great Skua (b)	Less common than the previous species but with small numbers daily, throughout.
43. Black-headed Gull (b)	Common throughout.
44. Common Gull (b)	Small numbers daily throughout.
45. Lesser Black-backed Gull (b)	Common coastally.
46. Herring Gull (b)	Less common than the previous species but recorded daily at the coast.
47. Iceland Gull	Not an Icelandic breeder, just two were seen, an immature over Snaefellsness on 5 <sup>th</sup> July and a cracking adult at Husavik on 7 <sup>th</sup> July.
48. Glaucous Gull (b)	A common breeder, coastally with a count of 67 at a roost at Snaefellsness on 9 <sup>th</sup> July.
49. Great Black-backed Gull (b)	Small numbers daily at all coastal sites.
50. Black-legged Kittiwake (b)	Abundant breeder on coastal cliffs.
51. Arctic Tern (b)	Thousands breeding at Snaefellsness, with a large colony outside the front door of the Snjofeld Hostel, for example.
52. Common Guillemot (b)	Super-abundant on the coastal breeding cliffs and during every sea-watch. A few Bridled morphs were picked out on the cliffs at Svortuloft.
53. Brunnich's Guillemot (b)	Dozens were visible at close range on the breeding cliffs at Svortuloft.
54. Razorbill (b)	Abundant on all coastal sea cliffs.
55. Black Guillemot (b)	Present in small numbers at all sea cliffs e.g. 20 on the cliffs at Arnarstapi on 5 <sup>th</sup> July.
56. Atlantic Puffin (b)	Common on all sea cliffs e.g. 45 on the cliffs at Svortuloft on 5 <sup>th</sup> July.
57. Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon (b)	Not considered to be true wild Rock Doves, birds were present both coastally and in the larger towns.
58. Meadow Pipit (b)	Common throughout.
59. White Wagtail (b)	A few daily, throughout.
	A few daily, throughout.

60. <i>Northern Wheatear (b)</i>	<i>Scarce in Iceland, the only sighting was of one in Reykjavik on 11<sup>th</sup> July.</i>  <i>A common and characteristic breeder. We often went to sleep to the strains of their nocturnal song. An occupied nest was discovered in rank grasses, at Husavik, on 6<sup>th</sup> July.</i>  <i>A few daily throughout.</i>  <i>Fairly common throughout.</i>  <i>Four, of the race Islandica, on 6<sup>th</sup> July at Myvatn, were the only sighting.</i>  <i>Scarce, with a total of six seen, at Snaefellsness and in the High Valleys.</i>
61. <i>Blackbird (b)</i>	
62. <i>Redwing (b)</i>	
63. <i>Common Raven (b)</i>	
64. <i>Common Starling (b)</i>	
65. <i>Common Redpoll (b)</i>	
66. <i>Snow Bunting (b)</i>	

So, how did we fare in our quest to see all the regular Icelandic breeding species in a week? Well, not too badly! Of the 71 regular breeders, we managed to see 63 – missing only Manx Shearwater, Storm Petrel, Leach's Petrel (all of which are only viewable, off-shore, from the southern tip of Iceland, which we hadn't time to visit), Cormorant, White-tailed Eagle, Grey Phalarope (which can only be viewed on Flatey Island, which we again didn't have time to visit), Short-eared Owl and Wren (the latter we thought we heard faintly a couple of times but not with enough certainty to include in our sightings). To compensate for those we dipped on, we did manage to find two Icelandic rarities (Common Pochard and King Eider) and two unseasonal birds in Turnstone and Iceland Gull.

### ***Mammal List***

<b><i>Species</i></b>	<b><i>Occurrence</i></b>
1. <i>Minke Whale</i>	<i>Several at Husavik on 6<sup>th</sup> July</i>
2. <i>Humpback Whale</i>	<i>Three at Husavik on 6<sup>th</sup> July</i>
3. <i>Harbour Porpoise</i>	<i>Three at Snaefellsness on 4<sup>th</sup> July</i>
4. <i>Orca</i>	<i>Four at Snaefellsness on 5<sup>th</sup> July</i>



5. <i>White-beaked Dolphin</i>	<i>Twelve at Snaefellsness on 5<sup>th</sup> July and six at Husavik on 6<sup>th</sup> July</i>
6. <i>Sperm Whale</i>	<i>One, a male, dead on the shoreline at Snaefellsness on 5<sup>th</sup> July.</i>
7. <i>Arctic Fox</i>	<i>One close to the side of the van, en route for Lake Myvatn, on 6<sup>th</sup> July.</i>



*Orcas*

### *Les Colley's Plant List and selection of Photographs*

#### Blue Flowers

Alaska Lupin

Alpine Gentian

Oysterplant

Devils –bit Scabious



Arctic Bartsia

Wild Pansy

Butterwort probably common

#### Violet Flowers

Heath Speedwell

Selfheal

Serrate Gentian ?



#### Reddish or Pink Flowers

Purple Saxifrage

Heath Spotted Orchid

Alpine Catchfly

Wild Thyme ssp Articus

Rosebay Willowherb

Arctic Riverbeauty



Alpine Willowherb

#### Reddish or Pink Flowers continued

Water Avens

Red Clover

Hairy Stonecrop

Heather

Moss Campion

Thrift





Ladies Smock

Bog Bilberry

Alpine Fleabane

Dwarf Fleabane

White Flowers

Sea Mayweed

Oxeye Daisy

White Clover

Mountain Avens

Grass of Parnassus

Sea Campion

Alpine Mouse-ear

Starwort Mouse-ear

Tufted Saxifrage

Lesser Stitchwort

Low Stitchwort

Marsh Pennywort

Meadowsweet

Rowan

White Flowers continued

Angelica ssp.archangelica

Scots Lovage

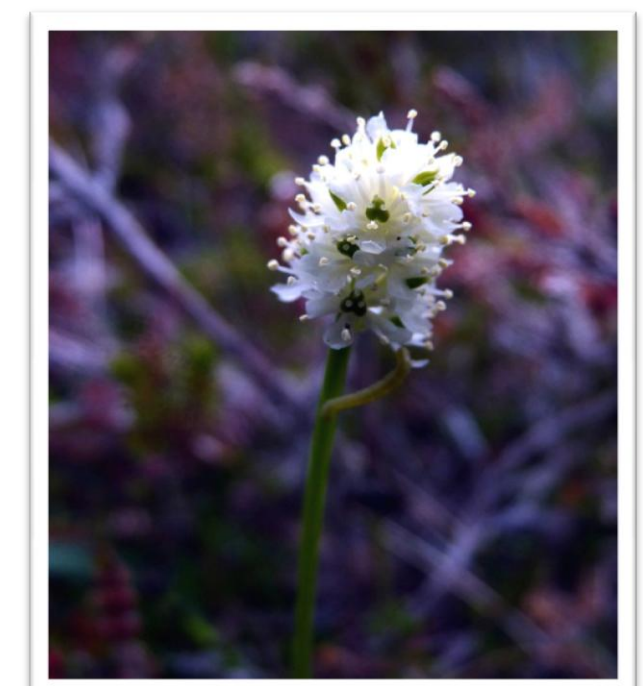
Sneezewort

Alpine Rock-cress

Northern Rock-cress

Snow Whitlowgrass

Alpine Whitlowgrass



Common Scurvygrass

Scottish Asphodel

Small Bedstraw

Common Wintergreen

#### Yellow Flowers

Marsh Marigold

Alpine Cinquefoil

Meadow Buttercup

Marsh Saxifrage

Roseroot

Ladies Bedstraw

Upright Lousewort

Dandelion



#### Mainly Green Plants

Alpine Lady's-Mantle

Northern Butterfly Orchid

Small White Orchid

Frog Orchid

Crowberry

Moonwort

Variegated Horsetail

Dwarf Willow





Woolly Willow

Bluish Willow

Mountain Sorrel

