



ICELAND: VIKING BIRDING

25 JUNE – 3 JULY 2023



Harlequin Duck is one of our spectacular targets on this Iceland birdwatching trip.

We look forward to welcoming you on our small-group tour to Iceland, the “Land of Ice and Fire”! Iceland sits in the North Atlantic just below the Arctic Circle at latitudes of 63° to 68° North, with the nearest land being Greenland some 180 miles (290 kilometers) away to the northwest. It is the most sparsely populated country in Europe. Iceland’s capital is Reykjavik, which is a city of typical, quaint, northern European architecture and makes an excellent starting point for our Iceland tour. Reykjavik, along with its surrounding areas, contains two thirds of the island’s population and once away from these areas, there are vast expanses of open wilderness.

Iceland sits some 600 miles (970 kilometers) from mainland Europe and 1,290 miles (2,070 kilometers) from mainland North America. After the United Kingdom, Iceland is Europe’s second-largest island and most of its climate is typical of the tundra regions. Two thirds of the landmass of Iceland is made up of tundra, while lakes (we will visit the impressive Lake Mývatn), stunning mountains, volcanos, lava fields, and glaciers cover the rest.

With abundant, almost constant, daylight during the middle of summer, the birds are active all day and night and despite the apparent harsh environments, there is a huge abundance of birds here during the summer months. This abundance of birds leads to quite a spectacle, particularly in terms of breeding seabirds, alcids, shorebirds, and wildfowl – many of which give excellent and close views, which makes for a true birders’ and photographers’ paradise. Some of the highlights associated with the sea and lakes on this tour include **King Eider**, **Common Eider**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common Scoter**, **Barrow’s Goldeneye** (Iceland is the only place this species regularly occurs in Europe), **Whooper Swan**, **Pink-footed Goose**, **Atlantic Puffin**, **Thick-billed Murre** (Brünnich’s Guillemot), **Black Guillemot**, **Parasitic Jaeger** (Arctic Skua), **Arctic Tern**, **Red (Grey) Phalarope**, **Red-necked Phalarope**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **European Golden Plover**, **Iceland Gull**, **Glaucous Gull**, **Northern Fulmar**, **Red-throated Loon** (Diver), **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver), and **Horned** (Slavonian) **Grebe**.



*The number of gorgeous (and tame) **Red-necked Phalaropes** we see on this tour is amazing!*

More land-based highlights include **Rock Ptarmigan**, **White-tailed Eagle**, **Gyr Falcon**, **Goldcrest**, **Eurasian Wren**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Red (Common) Crossbill**, **Common (Icelandic) Redpoll**, **Redwing**, **Common Blackbird**, **White Wagtail**, and **Snow Bunting**.



Redwing is one of several common breeding passerines to grace Iceland.

There is also a chance of vagrant species from North America and Europe (we have found some good birds on our previous tours here, like **Little Gull**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **American Wigeon**, and more) which adds to the excitement of a visit to Iceland, particularly for Western Palearctic listers. The waters off Iceland contain abundant sea-life and we will take a whale watching boat trip off Húsavík looking for the seriously massive **Blue Whale** and **Humpback Whale**, a definite tour highlight, while on land we might even come across an **Arctic Fox** as it hunts for nesting seabirds!

Bird watching in Iceland during the summer months offers so much more than the spectacle of millions of breeding birds, during our tour we will take in some of the Earth's greatest geological wonders. The huge forces that formed Iceland now add to its breathtaking majesty and curiosity to people the world over. The snow-capped mountains, volcanoes, staggering glaciers, huge fjords and lakes, and imperious and powerful waterfalls are all worthy of a visit in their own right. Iceland offers great accommodation, extremely friendly and welcoming people, some of the best food on any tour we run, and birds that will leave you totally exhilarated. Come and join us for a personal look at this incredible island.

If you want to add to your Arctic exploration you could combine this Iceland tour with our **Finland and Norway: Taiga and Tundra Adventure** and **Norway: Svalbard Polar Bear Cruise** tours. Joining two or three of these northern European tours together will give you a fascinating and a thoroughly memorable trip of a lifetime, with some amazing bird highlights.

Itinerary (9 days/8 nights)

Day 1. Arrival and travel to Snæfellsnes Peninsula

The tour will commence from Reykjavík-Keflavík International Airport at noon. Guests arriving in the morning will be met at the airport; if you are arriving the night (or more) before the tour we can arrange nearby accommodation for you, or if you would like to do some sightseeing in beautiful Reykjavík (you can relax after your flight at the world-famous Blue Lagoon Resort and Spa!), we can recommend hotels in Keflavik or the Reykjavik area and we can pick you up there.

Depending on arrival times there may be some optional birding near the airport, where we could get our trip lists going with species such as **Common Ringed Plover**, **Dunlin**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **European Herring Gull**, **Glaucous Gull**, **Iceland Gull**, **Snow Bunting**, **Arctic Tern**, or **Common Eider**.

We will commence our exciting bird tour by heading north past the capital city of Reykjavík to the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. Along the way we will keep our eyes peeled for **White-tailed Eagle** and **Gyr falcon**, which can occasionally be found along this route – and if we do see either of them, they would surely be an early trip highlight. A stop near Borgarnes and the Andakill mudflats will likely result in plenty of **Common Shelduck**, **Northern Fulmar**, and a great lunch. We will also keep our eyes peeled for any roadside pools. Sometimes these hold a great many birds, such as an **Arctic Tern** breeding colony, or a nesting pair of **Whooper Swan**, **Horned (Slavonian) Grebe**, or **Red-throated Loon** (Diver).

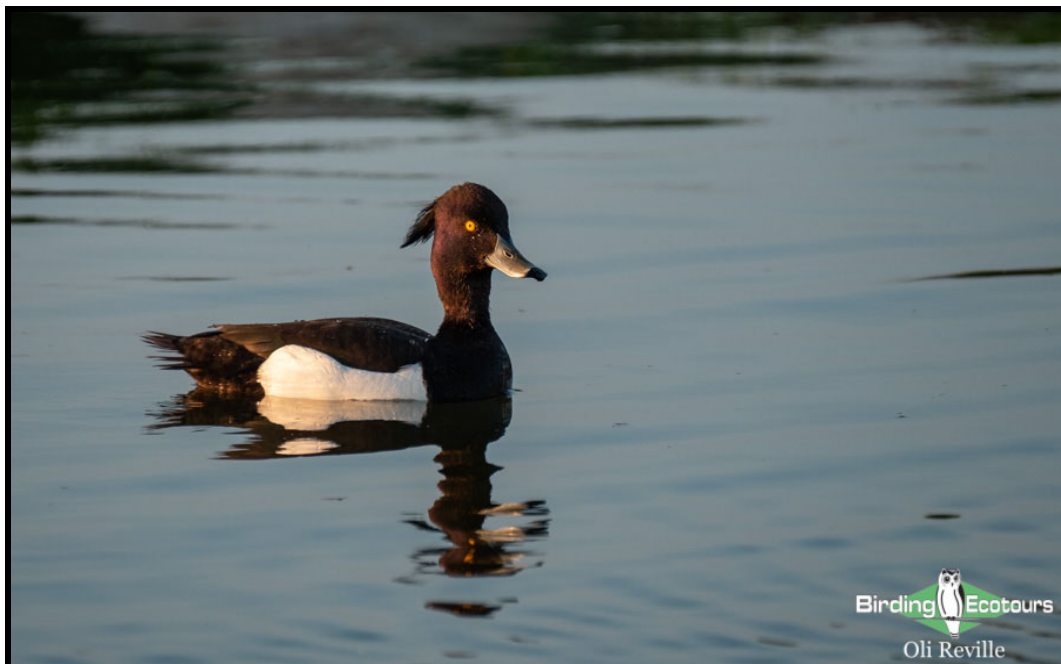
Overnight: Olafsvik, Snæfellsnes Peninsula



White-tailed Eagle is a huge bird, they can be seen on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

Day 2. Snæfellsnes Peninsula

We will spend the whole day birding around the western headland of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, which is a wonderful area, and we will have fun exploring the various birding spots here. Some pools near our accommodation are likely to have breeding **Greylag Goose**, **Whooper Swan**, **Red-throated Loon** (Diver), **Arctic Tern**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Tufted Duck**, and **Common Eider**. At this time of year there is also the ever-present sound of displaying shorebirds chipping and buzzing away overhead and these are likely to include **Common Snipe**, **Common Redshank**, and **Eurasian Oystercatcher**.



Tufted Duck is a common species but is rather unique with its interesting head tuft!

We will have our first look at the amazing sea cliffs, where we will observe the seabird breeding colonies as we locate **Thick-billed Murre** (Brünnich's Guillemot) among the large number of **Common Murre** (Common Guillemot), **Razorbill**, **European Shag**, and **Black-legged Kittiwake**. This site offers a fascinating experience, and we are sure of some great views. It is worth noting that the **Rock Doves** here are wild, 'real' ones, not just their feral cousins! While on the land above the cliffs, we have a good chance of finding **Rock Ptarmigan**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Snow Bunting**, and **Merlin**.

Small harbors on the peninsula may contain **Red Knot**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **Black Guillemot**, **Glaucous Gull**, **European Herring Gull**, and **Common Eider**, though one of the main highlights here will undoubtedly be if we find the simply breathtaking **Harlequin Duck**. This species must rate as one of *the* best-looking ducks in the world, though there is some great competition across the world, and several other contenders on this tour...

Overnight: Olafsvik, Snæfellsnes Peninsula



European Shag nest on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula and we will be sure to look out for them here.



Snow Bunting can be found breeding at different sites across Iceland and we often enjoy great views of them whilst birding on Flatey Island.

Day 3. Flatey Island

We will have an early start and drive across to Stykkisshólmur to catch the morning ferry to Flatey Island. Flatey Island is considered one of the most picturesque and scenically beautiful places in Iceland, and as soon as we arrive you will see why.

Around the docks at Stykkisshólmur we should see plenty of **Common Eider**, **Arctic Tern**, **Common Murre** (Guillemot), **Atlantic Puffin**, and loads of larids like **Glaucous Gull**, **Great Black-backed Gull**, **Black-headed Gull**, and **European Herring Gull**, plus plenty of **Black-legged Kittiwakes**. From the ferry we have a chance for **Manx Shearwater**, **Northern Gannet** and **Parasitic Jaeger** (Arctic Skua), though at this time of year they are just as likely to be seen cruising over fields as they are over the sea!

When we arrive at Flatey Island we will have the chance to look around for our main target, **Red (Grey) Phalarope**. This is one of the few places they breed in Iceland, and although the breeding area is closed during the breeding season, there is still a good chance to find them in the local area. Flatey Island also provides us with the opportunity to see the much more common and widespread, **Red-necked Phalarope** plus other shorebirds like **European Golden Plover**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Common Snipe**, **Dunlin**, and **Common Ringed Plover**. This area is also great for **Snow Bunting** and **Meadow Pipit**.

From Flatey Island we will catch the afternoon ferry to Breiðafjörður and drive to Breiðavík for the night. For those keen on an evening birding session (it does not really get dark here at this time of year!) we can visit the seabird colony at Látrabjarg. Our accommodation is set in the most fantastic scenery you could imagine and is a real treat.

Overnight: Breiðavík



Atlantic Puffin is one of the most-wanted birds on the planet, they are the clowns of the bird world and on the incredible cliffs of Látrabjarg we are sure of great views.

Day 4. Látrabjarg and Blönduós

Today we will visit the amazing Látrabjarg, the famous bird cliffs. Here thousands of breeding seabirds mass along the cliffs, creating a huge racket as they jostle for position along the cliff face. Huge numbers of **Common Murre** (Guillemot) and to a lesser extent **Thick-billed Murre** (Brünnich's Guillemot) and **Razorbill** breed alongside **Black-legged Kittiwake** and **Black Guillemot**. **Glaucous Gull**, **European Shag**, and **Great Cormorant** also squeeze in here among their noisy neighbors while **Arctic Foxes** can sometimes be found nearby looking for an easy snack.



The sight (and sound) of hundreds of thousands of allics whirling around us is something not to be missed and will not be forgotten.

Once we have taken in this spectacle, we will head for Blönduós. However, there will be the need for plenty of stops along the way, not least to check for breeding **Gyrfalcon** and **White-tailed Eagle** that can sometimes be found along the route, along with **Harlequin Duck**, **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver), and **Purple Sandpiper**.

Blönduós is the halfway point of our journey eastwards. Blönduós River and Blönduós Bay both provide some great birding, with species like **Common Eider** and sometimes **King Eider**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, and **Red-throated Loon** (Diver) seen around here, along with **Northern Wheatear**, **Meadow Pipit**, **White Wagtail**, **Dunlin**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **European Golden Plover**, **Black-headed Gull**, and **Parasitic Jaeger** (Arctic Skua).

Overnight: Blönduós

Day 5. Blönduós and Lake Mývatn

Today we will set off early and continue east to Lake Mývatn, our base for the next two nights. Along the way we will keep our eyes peeled for roadside **Harlequin Duck** and **Pink-footed Goose**. We will then spend the rest of the day exploring this wonderful lake that is packed full of breeding ducks.

This is the center of duck habitat in Iceland and is a spectacular site. We will spend the day driving the 25 miles (40 kilometer) worth of road that circumnavigates the lake, making strategic stops in different areas preferred for different species. Over the course of the day, we will hope to find a wide range of species, including **Greylag Goose**, **Whooper Swan**, **Gadwall**, **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Harlequin Duck**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Eurasian Teal**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Greater Scaup**, and **Common Scoter**.



Barrow's Goldeneye is one of the many waterfowl species we will encounter on this tour.

There is also a good chance for **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver) and **Red-throated Loon** (Diver), **Horned** (Slavonian) **Grebe**, **Short-eared Owl**, **Gyr Falcon**, **Merlin**, **Parasitic Jaeger** (Arctic Skua), **Redwing**, **Common Redpoll**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Dunlin**, **European Golden Plover**, **Northern Wheatear**, and the endemic subspecies of **Eurasian Wren**.

The spectacle of hundreds of **Red-necked Phalaropes** is sure to impress while we are birding here, and it really is an incredible sight. It is also worth keeping an eye-open for vagrants; in recent years we have found vagrant **American Wigeon**, **Lesser Scaup**, and **Ring-necked Duck** on the lake!

Overnight: Mývatn



*Breeding shorebirds (waders) abound around Lake Mývatn and we will get great views of **Black-tailed Godwit** (above). Other species offering amazing close views will include **Dunlin**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **European Golden Plover**, and the ubiquitous, **Red-necked Phalarope**.*



*The vast amount of prey means sightings of predators are frequent such as this **Short-eared Owl**. Other predators we might see here include **Gyr Falcon** and **Merlin**.*

Day 6. Lake Mývatn and Húsavík whale watching trip

We will have the morning birding around Lake Mývatn, mopping up any species we may still be looking for, or just appreciating the species we saw the previous day - there is little better than watching a myriad of baby ducks and shorebirds at close range and being amazed at how enough of them survive to keep the population going. There is also nothing cuter than a baby **Barrow's Goldeneye**, except maybe a baby **Red-necked Phalarope**!

In the afternoon we will head north for the rest of the day to the small harbor town of Húsavík, birding along the way. Our journey takes us through yet more spectacular scenery (this is true for every day of the tour in fact!) and we might find **Harlequin Duck**, **Rock Ptarmigan**, **Parasitic Jaeger** (Arctic Skua), or **Short-eared Owl** along the way.

On arrival at Húsavík we will take a whale watching tour into the bay. On the trip we could find **Blue Whale**, **Humpback Whale**, **Killer Whale** (Orca), **White-sided Dolphin**, and **Harbor Seal**. Here we will also have a chance to see plenty of **Atlantic Puffins** at another Flatey Island (no relation to the one we visit on Day 3!). There is also a massive **Arctic Tern** breeding colony here, plus **Black Guillemot**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **Dunlin**, **Common Redshank**, **Red-necked Phalarope**, and **Snow Bunting**. **Great Skua** and **Parasitic Jaeger** (Arctic Skua) are also found from the boat, and **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common Scoter**, and **Common Eider** are often seen here too.



*During the breeding season, **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver) is one of the most strikingly plumaged birds in the world. We will get some great views of this species during our Iceland birdwatching holiday.*

After our boat trip we will bird some areas around the town – this is one of the best sites in Iceland to find an over-summering **Iceland Gull** among the **European Herring Gulls** and other

larids. The setting also gives great photographic opportunities for birds like **Arctic Tern** and **Northern Fulmar** against a snow-capped mountain backdrop. A small lake should give us excellent views of **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver) and **Horned** (Slavonian) **Grebe** as well as **Black-tailed Godwit** and **Eurasian Whimbrel**.

Overnight: Mývatn



*We will see a lot of **Northern Fulmars** on the tour, we will also see a lot of spectacular snow-capped mountain scenery. Put the two together and you get some fun photo opportunities!*

Day 7. Lake Mývatn to Blönduós

We will spend a final morning around the wonderful Lake Mývatn, maybe trying to improve on our views and photographs of some of the area's special species such as **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Harlequin Duck**, **Red-throated Loon**, and **Red-necked Phalarope**. We will also make sure that we have connected with all of the resident and migrant passerines that should be present during our time on the island, several of these can be found in the small, stunted woodland patches around the lake, and along our route over the next couple of days with some preferring the adjacent more-open spaces. Some of the targets will include **Goldcrest** (amazing how this, the smallest bird in Europe, can survive up here!), **Eurasian Wren**, **Common Blackbird**, **Redwing**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Meadow Pipit**, **White Wagtail**, **Common Starling**, **Common** (Icelandic) **Redpoll**, **Red** (Common) **Crossbill**, and **Snow Bunting**.

After lunch we will head back west towards Blönduós, where we will again spend the night to break up the journey back to Reykjavík/Keflavík. Again, we will be on the lookout for **Harlequin Duck**, **Pink-footed Goose**, **Northern Raven**, and **Gyr Falcon** along the way.

Overnight: Blönduós



*Most people will be more familiar with seeing **Dunlin** in their drab, non-breeding plumage. To see them (and several other shorebird species) looking like this, is a real bonus of the tour.*



***European Golden Plover** takes spectacular to a whole other level, yet this plumage is not just for looks, it also serves tremendously well for camouflage.*

Day 8. Blönduós to Keflavík

This morning we will continue our journey back to Keflavík. We will call in at a couple of spots for some birding along the way, such as estuaries that may contain a nice surprise such as a **White-tailed Eagle**, and if time permits, we can also visit Flói Nature Reserve. The reclaimed marsh/bog/estuary that exists here today is one of the best spots to see **Red-throated Loon** (Diver). It was saved by Fuglavernd (BirdLife Iceland), and is home to breeding shorebirds like **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Red-necked Phalarope**, and **Black-tailed Godwit**, as well as to ducks like **Common Merganser** (Goosander), **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Tufted Duck**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, and **Whooper Swan**.

We will arrive in Keflavík in time for our farewell dinner and the tough assignment of choosing the “bird of the trip”, unsurprisingly it is never a straightforward or easy decision in Iceland!

Overnight: Keflavík



***Red-throated Loon** (Diver) is yet another attractive bird that can be found on the lakes and swamps across Iceland.*

Day 9. Departure

A non-birding day. Today we transfer to Reykjavík-Keflavík International Airport for your flights home, or potentially the relatively short flight to join our **Norway: Svalbard Polar Bear Cruise**, where we will be looking for (as the name suggests!) **Polar Bears**, along with some more high-Arctic specials like **Ivory Gull**, **Barnacle Goose**, **King Eider**, **Little Auk**, **Long-tailed Jaeger** (Skua), **Beluga Whale**, **Blue Whale**, **Walrus**, **Arctic Fox**, and much more!

Overnight: Not included.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes must use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 9 days
Group Size: 6 - 8
Dates: 25 June - 3 July 2023
Start: Reykjavík-Keflavík International Airport
End: Reykjavík-Keflavík International Airport
Prices: \$5,445 per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants (2023)
Single Supplements: \$1,440 (2023)

In the event of fewer than six participants signing up to the tour, there will be the option of a surcharge to guarantee departure. The amount of the surcharge will depend on how many participants are signed up to the tour and will occur if all participants agree.

Price includes:

All accommodation (Day 1 until Day 8 as described above, or similar, may include some shared bathroom facilities)
Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 9)
Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle
Expert tour leader and guide
Birdwatching site entrance fees
Whale watching trip in Húsavík
All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour, including ferry trips and airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

International flights
Visa fees if visa required
Departure tax if required
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))