

# Iceland in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

1 - 9 June 2018

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Humpback Whale by Keith Clarkson



Harlequin Duck by Keith Clarkson



Sperm Whale fluke by Keith Clarkson



Orca by Keith Clarkson

Report compiled by Keith Clarkson  
Images courtesy of Keith Turner, Sally Wearing, Chris Johnson & Keith Clarkson



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Tour participants: Keith Clarkson (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

## Summary

This tour of Iceland is timed to coincide with the return of a range of very special birds to their Icelandic breeding grounds. We enjoyed close views of iconic species such as Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-necked Phalarope, Great Northern Diver, Ptarmigan and many breeding waders and waterfowl and we watched in awe whilst a pair of nesting Gyrfalcon carried out a food pass.

Our two whale-watching trips were a great success with magnificent views of breaching Humpback Whale, family groups of Orca and a 'logging' Sperm Whale which literally blocked the path our boat.

Back on land the Arctic-alpine flora, so much a feature of Iceland, was just beginning to burst into flower as tufts of Moss Campion and Purple Saxifrage added a dash of colour to the landscape whilst the soft white miniature flowers of Mossy, Drooping, Irish and Alpine Snow Saxifrages provided a more hidden beauty.

And all of this set against a stunning wilderness landscape which provided us with an opportunity to visit spectacular waterfalls, fjords, calderas, rift valleys, steaming fumaroles and mud pools.

Our tour started in the north where we spent three days based at the Sel-Hotel Mývatn. We explored the famous Lake Mývatn, a large, shallow geo-thermal lake with an abundance of food for the burgeoning population of breeding birds. From here we visited Iceland's most powerful waterfall Dettifoss, explored the Krafla geo-thermal area and visited Húsavík to enjoy our first whale-watching trip. After which we travelled to the spectacular Snaefellsnes Peninsula where we visited the tranquil island of Flatey, joined a whale watching trip from Oláfsvík and visited the seabird colonies. For the last leg of our tour we travelled south to the famous 'Golden Circle' experiencing the wonderful waterfalls at Gullfoss and Seljalandsfoss, watched the regular eruptions of 'Strokkur' at Geysir and visited the Thingvellir National Park lake and rift valley, home to the site of Iceland's historic 'parliament'. On our last morning we travelled back through the Reykjanes Peninsula to Keflavik Airport before catching our Icelandair flight home.

## Day 1

Friday 1st June

### Heathrow – Keflavik – Akureyri – Sel-Hótel Mývatn

Sunshine, light variable breeze, 13C. The group arrived at Keflavik International Airport following a three hour flight from Heathrow Airport. Upon arrival the group were transported to the domestic airport at Reykjavik for the short flight to the northern town of Akureyri. The weather conditions were near perfect and the views from the aircraft were breathtaking with the glowing blue surfaced meltwater lakes punctuating the gleaming white snow and ice that wrapped itself around the black volcanic peaks and rugged landscape. The flight was over all too soon. Keith our tour leader was waiting at the airport with the group's minibus ready to take us to our first stop – the Sel-Hótel Myvatn, at Skútustathir overlooking the wonderful Lake Mývatn.

En route we called off at Gothafoos (Waterfall of the Gods) where legend has it that in 1000AD the lawspeaker, having decided that Christianity should be the official religion of Iceland, cast his statues of the traditional pagan

gods into the waterfall. Having whetted our appetites we continued our journey, seeing a remarkable four Short-eared Owls en route and getting our first glimpse of Barrow's Goldeneyes on the River Laxá.

On arrival at our hotel we quickly settled into our comfortable rooms and gathered in the lounge before dinner, where Keith outlined the aims of the tour and some of the highlights to be looked for. This was followed by a tasty dinner in the restaurant where we got to know each other better before retiring to our rooms where the backdrop of singing Redwing and chipping Snipe and the sun bursting through your window at 2.30 a.m. made sleeping a challenge.

## Day 2

Saturday 2nd June

### Hotel Mývatn - River Laxá – Lake Mývatn - Húsavík

Sunshine, gentle south-westerly breeze, 17 degrees C. A pre-breakfast walk took us through the pseudocraters that were formed when large bubbles of water, trapped inside the lava, exploded under pressure. This ring of small craters now encloses a shallow lake which borders the edge of Mývatn and is overlooked by the hotel. The lake itself is supplied by underground geo-thermal water which maintains a temperature of 4 degrees C throughout the year. These nutrient rich, shallow, warm waters support unimaginable numbers of Chironomid flies which have given the lake its name - 'My-vatn' which translated means 'Fly-lake'. Luckily, the vast majority of the midges don't bite and a simple head-net or an ability to avoid inhaling them ensured that they didn't detract from the experience.

This super-abundance of food is the key to Lake Mývatn's extraordinary bird-life. Our first encounters include three pairs of displaying and nesting Slavonian Grebe and dozens of boldly-marked female Red-necked Phalaropes swimming along the shore constantly picking individual flies off the water surface. The intense feeding is only disturbed when a lone male Phalarope appears, triggering frenzied chases by up to a dozen females. The lack of male Red-necked Phalaropes suggested that many must already be sitting on eggs whilst the promiscuous females feed, squabble and attempt to secure more matings. Other birds gracing our mini-Mývatn visit included Great Northern Diver, and breeding Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, Whooper Swan and a whole range of other waterfowl. The birds seemed oblivious of our presence allowing great opportunities for photography.

After breakfast we head north to Húsavík via the River Laxa, where we had very close views of Harlequin Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye, both of which seemed at home in the fast flowing waters of the river, dipping and diving down, overturning stones to reveal their prey. A few further stops enable us to get good views of breeding Common Scoter and our first brief view of Ptarmigan, cloaked predominantly in its white winter plumage.

We arrived at Húsavík in time to grab lunch and don our thermal 'onesies' before boarding the 'Andvari' the North Sailing whale watching company's electric-powered boat. The boat provides the perfect means of accessing the whales in the Skjálfandi Bay – no diesel fumes and completely silent. As we left the harbour a lone Black Guillemot, a Razorbill, a few Common Guillemot and three Great Skuas flew past adding to the sense of excitement. Within 30 minutes of setting sail one of our group spots a 'blow' – the game is on. Minutes later we see the first of six Humpback Whales. What follows is extraordinary - numerous sightings of a dispersed group of whales including one individual who spends ten minutes slapping the water with its tail flukes before diving and re-appearing with a spectacular breach which we manage to capture on film – a truly magical moment. North Sailing's expert guide explains how the pattern on the underside of the tail-fluke provides a unique

'fingerprint' which enables whale researchers to compile a register of thousands of Humpback Whales and track their movements around the oceans - individual whales seen in Skjáfandi Bay which have been seen feeding off Dominica and off Ireland. It is a fascinating experience and nearly two hours later we head back to the harbour satiated.

Heading back to our hotel we call off briefly at a lake that looks as though it could have breeding Great Northern Diver and lo and behold a pair are nesting on the small island in the middle of the lake.

A final stop at the River Laxá reveals even more Barrow's Goldeneyes and Harlequin Ducks feeding along the length of the river. A fitting end to a wonderful day.

## Day 3

Sunday 3rd June

Hotel Mývatn – Krafla – Viti - Dettifoss and Selfoss – Hverir – Höfthi – Dimmunborgir

Sunshine, light south-west wind and 16 degrees C. After a rich selection of breakfast offerings we headed north-east to the Krafla Fissure, an area of intense geothermal activity just 30 minutes' drive from our hotel. Here we experience one of the highlights of the holiday. On a pre-trip recce Keith and Marcus, the leader of the 'Iceland Undiscovered' Naturetrek tour, located a Gyr Falcon nest which could easily be observed from the road without causing any disturbance. Whilst watching the immature female on the nest through our 'scopes' we hear a distant call, the female suddenly leaves the nest and flies low along the cliffs, up across the valley to a ridge where the smaller male circles. The pair move together, rolling 180 degrees in mid-air, a food pass is completed, when unbelievably, a third bird briefly appears, then departs, and the two original birds head back towards the nest ledge overlooking the valley and calm is restored. A moment we could only dream of prior to our tour.

Still buzzing with excitement we head to the Viti explosion crater to explore a small volcanic caldera which erupted in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. As we step outside of our mini-bus the air fills with the song of a singing Snow Bunting. We quickly locate a stunning male in full breeding plumage set against the dark volcanic rock and sky blue mineral rich waters of the caldera. Whilst taking panoramic photos of this wonderful scene we note three Ringed Plover displaying on the water's edge and a lone Purple Sandpiper in full summer plumage. A quick search of the exposed slopes of the volcano reveals tufts of Purple Saxifrage still in flower.

From Viti we head east across one of the largest stone deserts in Western Europe before reaching our destination - the waterfalls of Selfoss and Dettifoss. Nothing can prepare us for the sheer power and majesty of the latter - as we join the throng of visitors and wind our way across the desolate desert plateau only the plume of spray and growing rumble of water gives any clue as to what awaits us. Unexpectedly, we rise above a small hill and we feel as though we have stepped into a different world. A wall of sound engulfs us, and a rainbow, of such intensity, fills our view, whilst below us the mud-laden grey melt-waters of the Jökulsá á Fjöllum River which have carved out a deep basalt gorge, plunges into a narrow ravine producing a column of spray hundreds of feet high. It is a supreme sight and by volume creates the largest waterfall in Europe.

From the magnificence of Dettifoss we head back west across the desert to the geo-thermal mud-pools and fumaroles of Hverir – the smell of Hydrogen Sulphide fills our nostrils as we step from the mini-bus, slate-grey bubbling viscous mud-pools gurgle and powerful sulphur-laden steam vents spew their contents leaving a coating of perfectly-formed sulphur crystals on the surrounding rock. A sensual experience not-to be missed.

A picnic lunch follows in the delightful private nature reserve at Höfthi. This is a peaceful place where footpaths meander through Birch woodland and which resounds with the song of the boldly-marked Icelandic race of the Redwing, and the buzzing-calls of Common Redpoll, both nesting in the Dwarf Birch. A singing Goldcrest provides an unexpected distraction as this is a relatively recent colonist in Iceland. The paths reveal numerous otherwise hidden, larva-sculpted coves on the shores of Lake Mývatn. Here Barrow's Goldeneye nest in holes in larva pinnacles and non-breeding flocks gather below on the crystal clear waters revealing their gaudy red legs and feet.

With our senses alive we return to our hotel for a fine dinner before heading out once more to the dramatic wooded lava-fields of Dimmuborgir. Here, lost in a maze of paths, we find the 'sky-hole' high on a lava pinnacle through which the trail passes – entering through and seeing the landscape beyond brings back childhood images of stepping into Narnia and is a fitting end to another fine day in Iceland.

## Day 4

Monday 4th June

### Hotel Mývatn – Akureyri – Noroura Valley - Stykkisholmur

Light South-westerly winds, sunshine and 13 degree C. Today we leave Lake Mývatn and travel to the Fosshotel, in Stykkisholmur on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula, a long trip made more enjoyable by breaking the journey into manageable stages. Our first stop is barely an hour in - at a small gravel pit on the east bank of the Eyjaffarhá Valley, south of Akureyri where Keith had located a breeding pair of Red-throated Diver on a small pool. Parking alongside the pool we are able to use the van as a mobile hide and obtain stunning views of the two adult birds and their two young chicks. From here we head north to Gásir, a few kilometres north of Akureyri. This is an historic site in a beautiful coastal setting overlooking the Eyjaförður Fjord that used to be home to the main trading port of Northern Iceland in the Middle Ages, A simple reconstruction and interpretation board provides an invaluable insight into life in Iceland at this time informing us of how Gyr Falcons were sold to traders. Around us a wealth of waders including Black-tailed Godwit, Golden Plover, Redshank and Snipe display, a large colony of Arctic Terns nest amongst the simple dunes and a pair of Shelduck feed in the bay.

After a short stop our journey continues. Rising high into the Öxanadalur and Noroura Valleys we witness the vast breeding colony of thousands of Pink-footed Goose. The sight of so many geese breeding in such a stark environment provides such a contrast to the richer, lowland farmed habitats preferred by the many breeding Greylag Goose we have seen so far on our trip.

A stop for a picnic lunch near Blönduós gives an opportunity to photograph the ubiquitous but nevertheless beguiling Icelandic ponies and a refreshment stop at Borganes further breaks the journey, ahead of crossing the mist shrouded Snaefellsnes Peninsula through the stark lava fields of the Beserkjahraun, where a large bird sat atop a power pylon brings us to a stop. Hopes of another Gyrfalcon are quickly dashed as a view through the telescope reveals a Ptarmigan!!

We arrive at the Fosshotel, in Stykkishólmur in the fog in time for our evening meal and the chance to unwind after our long drive.

## Day 5

Tuesday 5th June

### Stykkishólmur – Flatey – Kolgrafafjörður

Thick fog in the morning breaking up with sunshine in the afternoon, 10 degrees C. Our first morning in Stykkishólmur, the largest town on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula. Snaefellsnes boasts all the geographical features that typify the country. Iceland's first national park lies at the western extremity and includes Snaefelljökull, a shield volcano topped by an ice-sheet. The coastline is rugged and the cliffs and wetlands hold large numbers of breeding birds. But on this morning we awake to dense fog, wondering whether the ferry to the small island of Flatey will even sail. Thankfully after another fine breakfast the fog starts to ebb and flow and with renewed optimism we meander down to the harbour for our 9am sailing. The crossing reveals little of the wonder of the Breithafjörður other than occasional feeding rafts of Atlantic Puffin, Northern Gannet, Arctic Skua and our first sighting of Glaucous Gull. An all too brief sighting of a small Dolphin, with white flank markings whets the appetite but the fog closes once more and our hopes are dashed.

On reaching Flatey the fog starts to roll back revealing a picturesque island with a scattering of painted timber houses, local people going about their jobs and birds everywhere you look. The air resounds with the echoing calls of Redshank, chipping Common Snipe and chasing parties of Red-necked Phalaropes. The path winds its way through the heart of the small community, past the island's pub and café, to a small church. A brief look inside reveals a dramatic mural of life on the island including images of White-tailed Sea Eagle and Atlantic Puffin, the latter being hunted with the traditional Fleyg net.

We continue our walk past nesting Arctic Terns, displaying Snow Buntings and a female Common Eider sitting tight on her nest, one metre from the path – almost perfectly camouflaged. Having reached the boundary of the conservation area we sit and wait. A few Atlantic Puffins arrive, performing briefly for their audience before disappearing into the dark of their nesting burrows, Fulmars growl and gurgle from their rocky ledges and we wait. After an hour of lazing, enjoying our picnic lunches in the warming sun, our target bird appears, a fleeting view of a small wader flying low across the startlingly clear icy waters with larger build and deep reddish brown under and upperparts contrasting with the bold white wing-bar – a female Grey Phalarope - an all too brief glimpse at the only accessible breeding site in Europe. With the fog still only just hanging off it was now time to return to Stykkishólmur for welcome refreshments.

By mid-afternoon the sun has won the battle and we head out to explore the Kolgrafafjörður and Hraunfjörður – a stunningly beautiful landscape and a site where in 2012 an earlier Naturetrek tour witnessed a mass Herring mortality when millions of spawning Herring became trapped in the fjord pursued by hunting packs of Orca which came to the head of the fjord, passing under the low road bridge and the disbelieving group, in their desire to catch their bounty. On this visit all was calm, no mass herring and no Orca or slaughter just a thousand, predominantly male Common Eider, over 250 Glaucous Gull, small numbers of Red-breasted Merganser and Black Guillemot and a party of 12 Knot and one Sanderling all resplendent in their striking summer plumage. With time now against us we head back to Stykkishólmur and to the local fish restaurant in the harbour – a fitting end to our day.

## Day 6

Wednesday 6th June

### Stykkishólmur – Oláfsvik – Ondverthanes/Nesbjarg – Vördufell

A grey start to the day gave way to sunny intervals and a light SW breeze 15 degrees C. We awoke to cloud-laden but fog-free skies allowing us to enjoy the Fosshotel's lovely views of the Breithafjörður. The fjord is Iceland's most expansive area of shallow coastal water and is rich in wildlife. The area has greater tides and tidal currents than elsewhere in the country and its islands appear almost infinite in number, the best estimate being around 2,500! The area supports two-thirds of the Icelandic White-tailed Sea Eagle population, about a third of the Icelandic Common Eider population and many large seabird colonies. The Breithafjörður also supports a substantial population of large and small cetaceans - today's goal.

After breakfast we drove along the scenic northern coast road to the small town of Oláfsvik where we boarded the Láki Tours boat, the 'Iris'. As we departed a quick scan of the harbour wall revealed a lone immature Iceland Gull – our first of the trip. Luck was once again with us and the sea conditions were perfect for whale-watching. Within half an hour our Láki Tours guide announced that a lone bull Orca had been located. Within seconds we saw the dramatic, ominous looking tall black wavy dorsal fin of the Orca – nothing quite prepares you for the size of the fin – it looks more like the sail of small yacht than a living creature. Closer views followed and our guide explained that the shape of the white saddle-mark and the dorsal fin itself provide an identification 'fingerprint' much as we had seen earlier on our trip with the tail flukes of the Humpback Whales. Our guide explained that they now have a catalogue of over 600 Orca and that there seem to be different groups at different time of year. But by now our attention was drawn towards a cluster of smaller fins – a family group of Orca – a mother and her two or three year-old calf, a juvenile and an immature male. We watched transfixed as the lone bull became more interested in the group but all remained calm as they made their way along the fjord. Whilst watching the Orcas one of our group spotted the blow of a larger whale and the skipper of the boat decided that it was time to search in the deeper waters to see if we could locate them. Within thirty minutes a 'logging' adult male Sperm Whale was found lying on the surface of the water revealing the top of his huge head and the small flattened dorsal fin. We approached anticipating the inevitable dive, but the whale seemed indifferent to our presence, allowing the boat to approach alongside – it is hard to imagine the size of these magnificent creatures until you see one so close – by comparing it with the length of the boat we estimate that the whale is between 60 and 70 feet long. Finally a roaring blow from the single nostril on the left hand side of the head alerts us to the impending dive and the whale's back starts to arch before the dark grey-brown tail flukes rise out of the water as it slips effortlessly into the depths of the sea – memorable.

Satiated, and with the clock running out on our three hour trip we head back to the harbour allowing an opportunity to learn more about the lives of these fascinating creatures. Our guide explains that, sadly, whale hunting continues in Iceland under strict quotas, allegedly to supply a traditional demand for whale meat. However, 80% of all the meat obtained is used to supply the demand from the tourist market! The company's message was clear - boycott restaurants that sell whale meat.

On land we take a celebratory group photo, donned in our fine blue 'onesies', against the backdrop of the Láki Tours Orca board. We now drive towards the very western tip of the peninsula to explore the black basalt seabird cliffs between the Öndverdarnes and Svörtuloft lighthouses. Our first stop reveals a Razorbill and a small group of nesting Common Guillemot alongside the ubiquitous Kittiwakes and Fulmar. Then below us we find a lone Brunnich's Guillemot – the larger, stockier cousin of the Common Guillemot with its diagnostic bronzy

sheen and tell-tale white gape-line. We manage to get a group of visiting Americans onto the Brunnich's Guillemot. Delighted, they exchange pleasantries with us and we discover that they have just seen an Arctic Fox alongside the road and earlier watched a pair of White-tailed Sea Eagle displaying. We didn't take much persuading and quickly headed back east to search for these target species.

Perhaps not surprisingly we failed to locate the Arctic Fox but we did find a splendid adult White-tailed Sea Eagle sat atop a rock close to the water's edge. It made us realise how easy it was to miss this impressive bird and that you really did need to check almost every rock to find them. Our drive back to the hotel was briefly interrupted by a stunning male Ptarmigan that insisted on displaying in the middle of the road, showing little regard for our need to get back to the hotel in time for our evening meal. We did make it, but only just - after all, you can't ignore a displaying Ptarmigan can you?

## Day 7

Thursday 7th June

### Fosshotel, Stykkishólmur – Borganes – Thingvellir – Thingvellvatn – Geysir

Early drizzle gave way to a light SW breeze and sunny intervals – 17 degrees C. It was time to move on to our next hotel located in Iceland's famous 'Golden Circle'. After a relaxed breakfast we packed the bags and headed south, following the west coast, passing through the famous six kilometre long Hvalfjörður tunnel to the outskirts of Reykjavik, where we headed inland to the Thingvellir National Park.

Thingvellir brings together the geological processes and cultural history that shaped Iceland, for the rift valley that lies at the heart of the mid-Atlantic Ridge runs through Thingvellir. Here the great tectonic plates of North America and Eurasia are almost imperceptibly being pushed apart as magma from the depths of the Earth is brought to the surface in this area of high geo-thermal activity. The visitor centre provides great views from the western boundary of the rift valley across to the eastern boundary, with in between the great lake – Thingvallavatn.

Exploring the wonderful area around the visitor centre provides unexpected rewards. We walked down the western fissure to the 'Logberg' or 'Law-rock' which was the focal point for the country's ancient parliament - the Althingi, established in 960 AD and still a site of great symbolic significance. Our walk was interrupted by a pair of Merlin nesting in the cliff below the centre which entertained us whilst we have lunch, six Harlequin Duck sat in the small stream below the waterfall, Redwing displayed and sang from every perch and stunningly marked Icelandic races of Golden Plover, Whimbrel and Snipe fed in the picnic area oblivious of the day's visitors.

After lunch there is time to explore the quiet rocky coves along the edge of Thingvallavatn. Ubiquitous Arctic Terns feed on the small fish that abound in the lake, but the star of the show is a pair of Great Northern Diver nesting close-by on a small island. The female sits, panting on the nest in the heat of the sun, when suddenly the male flies in between us and the island. Lying prostrate on the surface of the water he throws his neck forwards and upwards emitting a deafening cry that sets the hairs of the back of our necks on end - there can be fewer more evocative and exhilarating experiences than watching and hearing displaying Great Northern Divers.

From Thingvellir we follow the road to Geysir which gave its name to the phenomena of eruptive hot springs. 'Geysir' itself is rarely active but its close neighbour is far more reliable, providing regular eruptions up to 20

metres high every few minutes. It's impossible not to get caught up in the fun and excitement enjoyed by so many tourists, trying to predict the irruption, get the perfect photograph and dodge the spray – just one more go...

Shortly, after we arrived at our destination, the Hotel Gullfoss.

## Day 8

Friday 8th June

### Gullfoss – Seljalandfoss – Flói Bird Reserve – Sog River – Gullfoss Plateau

Low cloud, mist and drizzle lifting in the afternoon. Slight south-east breeze. 12 degrees C. We awoke to low, cloud, mist and drizzle – not ideal weather conditions but after the wonderful weather we have experienced so far on our trip we felt we couldn't complain. An early start ensured that we had our first waterfall, the spectacular Gullfoss to ourselves. This is one of Iceland's most famous waterfalls, and it is little wonder. The sight and sound of the two basalt waterfalls almost perched on top of one another pouring into a narrow 70 metre deep gorge, carved out of softer sedimentary rocks, is awe-inspiring and provides the perfect aperitif for yet another excellent breakfast!

Refreshed we head south towards the infamous Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which, when it erupted in 2010, as well as causing international disruption to air traffic movements, probably became even more famous as news-readers around the world attempted, usually in vain, to pronounce its name correctly! Given the weather was closing in we decided to focus on the Seljalandfoss and Gljúfrabúinn waterfalls where a sequence of waterfalls plummet over an old, 65 metre now land-locked sea cliff. The chance to walk behind the main falls is an opportunity not to be missed, so, donned from head to toe in our waterproofs, we explore this wonderful place, an experience that doesn't disappoint. Our exploration reveals a wonderful array of flowers including the exquisite Irish Saxifrage and the first Wren, of the Icelandic race, Rock Dove and singing Chiffchaff, an unusual visitor to these northern shores.

With the mist and drizzle starting to lift we head to the Ölfusá floodplain, near Selfoss, to visit the Flói Bird Reserve. The long track to the reserve provides a succession of stunning views of waders sat atop fence posts, Snipe, Redshank, Whimbrel and Black-tailed Godwit all perform for their enthralled audience. On arrival at the reserve we watch several pairs of breeding Red-throated Diver whilst a pair of Arctic Skuas harass the local breeding birds.

From Flói we head north on our return journey via the Sog River valley where we find more Harlequin Ducks, another Great Northern Diver and numerous Red-breasted Merganser.

## Day 9

Saturday 9th June

### Gullfoss Hotel – Reykjanes Peninsula - Blue Lagoon – Keflavik - UK

Thick fog and rain lifting late morning just in time for our flight!. Dense mist and constant rain and drizzle greet us on our final morning in Iceland. So with very limited visibility we decide to abandon our plans to explore the Reykjanes Peninsula as we drive from our hotel to Keflavik airport. Instead we drive past the extraordinary 'Blue

Lagoon, to garner record photographs of this impressive tourist destination and call briefly at Keflavik harbour where we find the ubiquitous Snipe and displaying Dunlin and our last Glaucous Gulls.

At Keflavik airport we briefly reflect on a truly memorable trip and say our goodbyes.

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Barrow's Goldeneye (female) by Keith Clarkson



Tufted Saxifrage by Keith Clarkson



Slavonian Grebe by Keith Clarkson



Icelandic Redwing by Keith Clarkson

## Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	June								
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>				2		2		7	
2	Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	2	3	1	3		1	2	1	
3	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	6	20	✓	✓					
4	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		2			6	20			
6	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				3					
7	Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>					✓	20	1		
8	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	100s	✓	✓	✓	100s	✓
9	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		1	8	1000+					
10	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				2					
12	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		1							
13	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				2	
14	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓						
15	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			1						
17	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓		✓			2	2	
18	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
19	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	5	✓		2	2	2	3		
20	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓		✓	1000	✓	✓	✓	
21	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>		12					8	7	
22	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyernalis</i>	5	✓	✓	✓					
23	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	4	6							
24	Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>	1	12	30	✓				2	
25	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		2	4	6	8	4	10	6	✓
26	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>								2	
27	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>						1			
28	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>							2	2	
29	Gyr Falcon	<i>Falco rusticolus</i>			3						
30	Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>	1					1		1	
31	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			3	2	6	1	1	7	
33	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>					1	1			
35	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>				3	11	12			
36	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				2	1	2	2		2
37	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>			1						
38	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			2	6	
40	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Grey Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>					1				
43	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>		3							
45	Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		2	1	3	1	1		4	1
46	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		4			✓	✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	June									
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
48	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>			✓	✓				1		
49	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			✓	✓		2	2			2
50	Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>						250	✓			9
51	Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucooides</i>							1			
52	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		10				1	100			
56	Brünnich's Guillemot	<i>Uria lomvia</i>							1			
57	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		1					4			
58	Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>		1				20	✓			
59	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓				✓	✓			
60	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>									1	
61	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	4	2	1	1						
62	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>									1	
63	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			1							
64	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>									1	
67	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			1	1	2	3				
68	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus coburni</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>		1	✓					1		
72	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>		1	3	1	6					

## Mammals

1	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>		6								
2	Orca (Killer Whale)	<i>Orcinus orca</i>						5				
3	Sperm Whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>						1				
4	Dolphin spp			2								

## Plants

Common Name	Scientific name	Mývatn area	Snaefellsnes Area	Golden Circle area
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	✓		
Alpine Lady's Mantle	<i>Alchemilla alpina</i>	✓	✓	✓
Hairy Lady's Mantle	<i>Alchemilla filicualis</i>	✓		
Clustered Lady's Mantle	<i>Alchemilla glomerulans</i>	✓	✓	✓
Garden Angelica	<i>Angelica archangelica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Wild Angelica	<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	✓		✓
Sweet Vernal Grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Northern Rock-cress	<i>Arabis alpina</i>	✓	✓	✓
Alpine Rock-cress	<i>Arabis alpina</i>	✓		✓
Bearberry	<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	✓	✓	✓
Arctic Sandwort	<i>Arenaria norvegica</i>	✓		
Silverweed	<i>Argentina anserina</i>	✓	✓	✓
Thrift	<i>Armeria maritima</i>	✓	✓	✓
Maidenhair Spleenwort	<i>Asplenium trichomanes</i>			✓
Lady Fern	<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>			✓

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Babington's Orache	<i>Atriplex glabriuscula</i>		✓	
Wavy-hair Grass	<i>Avenella flexuosa</i>	✓	✓	✓
Alpine Bartsia	<i>Bartsia alpina</i>	✓	✓	✓
Dwarf Birch	<i>Betula nana</i>	✓	✓	✓
Downy Birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>	✓	✓	✓
Alpine Bistort	<i>Bistorta vivipara</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Moon-wort	<i>Botrychium lunaria</i>	✓		
Intermediate Water-starwort	<i>Callitriche hamulata</i>	✓	✓	
Vernal Water-starwort	<i>Callitriche palustris</i>	✓	✓	
Heather	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>			✓
Marsh Marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Alpine Bitter-cress	<i>Cardamine bellidifolia</i>		✓	
Hairy Bitter-cress	<i>Cardamine hirsuta</i>			✓
Cuckoo Flower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Stiff Sedge	<i>Carex bigelowii</i>		✓	✓
Lyngbye's Sedge	<i>Carex lyngbyei</i>		✓	✓
Common sedge	<i>Carex nigra</i>		✓	✓
Alpine Mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium alpinum</i>	✓		✓
Starwort Mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium cerastoides</i>	✓	✓	
Common Mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	✓	✓	
Arctic Mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium nigrescens</i>	✓		
Common Scurvy-grass	<i>Cochlearia officinalis</i>	✓	✓	
Marsh Cinquefoil	<i>Comarum palustre</i>	✓		
brittle Bladder Fern	<i>Cystopteris fragilis</i>	✓		✓
Hoary Whitlowgrass	<i>Draba incana</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rock Whitlowgrass	<i>Draba norvegica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Whitlowgrass	<i>Draba verna</i>	✓		
Mountain Avens	<i>Dryas octopetala</i>	✓	✓	✓
crowberry	<i>Empetrum nigrum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Alpine Willow-herb	<i>Epilobium anagallidifolium</i>	✓		
Cliff Willow-herb	<i>Epilobium collinum</i>			✓
Field Horsetail	<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rough Horsetail	<i>Equisetum hyemale</i>	✓		
Shady Horsetail	<i>Equisetum pratense</i>	✓		
variegated Horsetail	<i>Equisetum variegatum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Cotton-grass	<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	✓		
Cold Eyebright	<i>Euphrasia frigida</i>	✓		
Viviparous Sheep's Fescue	<i>Festuca vivipara</i>	✓	✓	✓
Wild Strawberry	<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	✓		✓
Slender Bedstraw	<i>Galium normanii</i>	✓	✓	
Lady's Bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Wood Geranium	<i>Geranium sylvaticum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Water Avens	<i>Geum rivale</i>	✓		
Mossy Mountain-heather	<i>Harrimanella hypnoides</i>	✓		
Mare's-tail	<i>Hippuris vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	
Sea Sandwort	<i>Honkenya peploides</i>		✓	
Alpine Rush	<i>Juncus alpinarticulatus</i>	✓		
Jointed Rush	<i>Juncus articulatus</i>		✓	
Juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Bellard's Kobresia	<i>Kobresia myosoroides</i>	✓	✓	✓
Iceland Purslane	<i>Koenigia islandica</i>		✓	
Lyme-grass	<i>Leymus arenarius</i>		✓	
Trailing Azalea	<i>Loiseleuria procumbens</i>	✓	✓	

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Nootka Lupin	<i>Lupinus nootkatensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Heath Wood-rush	<i>Luzula multiflora</i>	✓	✓	
Spiked Wood-rush	<i>Luzula spicata</i>	✓	✓	
Bog-bean	<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>		✓	✓
Oyster Plant	<i>Mertensia maritima</i>		✓	
Mountain Sandwort	<i>Minuartia rubella</i>	✓		
Blinks	<i>Montia fontana</i>	✓		
Sweet Cicely	<i>Myrrhis odorata</i>	✓		
Mat-grass	<i>Nardus stricta</i>	✓	✓	
Wood Sorrel	<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>	✓		
Mountain Sorrel	<i>Oxyria digyna</i>	✓	✓	✓
Iceland Poppy	<i>Papaver croceum</i>	✓		
Arctic Poppy	<i>Papaver radicum</i>	✓	✓	
Northern Grass of Parnassus	<i>Parnassia palustris</i>	✓		
Beech Fern	<i>Phegopteris connectilis</i>			✓
Alpine Cat's-tail	<i>Phleum alpinum</i>	✓		
Timothy	<i>Phleum pratense</i>			✓
Common Butterwort	<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Sea Plantain	<i>Plantago maritima</i>		✓	✓
Aline Meadow Grass	<i>Poa alpina</i>		✓	
Alpine Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla crantzii</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Wintergreen	<i>Pyrola minor</i>	✓		
Meadow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Roseroot	<i>Rhodiola rosea</i>		✓	✓
Stone Bramble	<i>Rubus saxatilis</i>		✓	✓
Common Sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	✓	✓	✓
Sheep's Sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>		✓	✓
Northern Dock	<i>Rumex longifolius</i>	✓	✓	✓
Snow Pearlwort	<i>Sagina nivalis</i>	✓		
Procumbent Pearlwort	<i>Sagina procumbens</i>	✓	✓	✓
Alpine Pearlwort	<i>Sagina saginoides</i>	✓		
Arctic willow	<i>Salix arctica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Dwarf Wilow	<i>Salix herbacea</i>	✓	✓	✓
Woolly Willow	<i>Salix lantana</i>	✓	✓	✓
Tea-leaved Willow	<i>Salix phylicifolia</i>	✓		✓
Drooping Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga cernua</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mossy Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga hypnoides</i>			✓
Alpine Snow Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga nivalis</i>			✓
Purple Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga oppositifolia</i>	✓	✓	✓
Irish Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga rosacea</i>	✓		✓
Starry Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga stellaris</i>		✓	
biting Stonecrop	<i>Sedum acre</i>	✓	✓	
Moss Champion	<i>Silene acaulis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Red Champion	<i>Silene dioica</i>	✓		
Sea Champion	<i>Silene uniflora</i>	✓	✓	
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	✓	✓	✓
Cedommon Chickwe	<i>Stellaria media</i>	✓	✓	
dandelion spp.	<i>Taraxacum spp.</i>	✓	✓	✓
Wild Thyme	<i>Thymus praecox</i>	✓	✓	✓
Scottish Asphodel	<i>Tofieldia pusilla</i>	✓		
Deergrass	<i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i>	✓	✓	
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	✓		
White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	✓	✓	✓

Common Name	Scientific name	Mývatn area	Snaefellsnes Area	Golden Circle area
Sea arrowgrass	<i>Triglochin maritima</i>		✓	
Marsh Arrowgrass	<i>Triglochin palustris</i>	✓		✓
Colt's-foot	<i>Tussilago farfara</i>			✓
Bilberry	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	✓	✓	
Bog Bilberry	<i>Vaccinium uliginosum</i>	✓		✓
Heath Dog Violet	<i>Viola canina</i>	✓	✓	
Northern Marsh Violet	<i>Viola epipsila</i>	✓		
Marsh Violet	<i>Viola palustris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Dog Violet	<i>Viola riviana</i>		✓	
Wild Pansy	<i>Viola tricolor</i>	✓		



Fulmars by Chris Johnson



Orca, Mother and 2yr old by Keith Turner



Rainbow and waterfall by Sally Wearing