

Undiscovered Iceland

Naturetrek Tour Report

19th – 27th May 2023



Slavonian Grebe by Neil McMahon



Puffin by Neil McMahon



Ptarmigan by Lisa & Chris Hayes



Arctic Fox by Dave Jackson

Tour report by Neil McMahon



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Summary

Despite some challenging weather conditions at times, our intrepid and determined 'Team Undiscovered Iceland 2023', timed our excursions to mostly miss the rain and snow but had to battle through some gusty days to thoroughly enjoy the sights and sounds of this tour of a truly epic country. Waterfalls with spray, glistening rocks and flying Fulmars greeted us as we navigated first to the east, spying an all white Arctic Fox en-route (well spotted Claire) and walking paths to stand next to glaciers and their melt water lakes, moraine dumps and erratics. We listened to the constant chatter of Redwings and the bleating, chipping and drumming of countless numbers of displaying Common Snipe as we stalked through Lupins, Dwarf Willow and Silver Birch scrub.

A blue lake with icebergs, a beach strewn with 'diamond ice' boulders, larva fields adorned with mosses and lichen provided awe-inspiring views with dormant and not so dormant volcanoes and snow-capped peaks all around. An excursion to an isolated headland nature reserve provided close views of Puffin and Great Skua as we drove across a volcanic black sand desert to reach it.

Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, Purple Sandpipers and Ptarmigan, Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese were seen in numbers as we enjoyed the sight of Whooper Swan herds mixing with Reindeer and Icelandic Horses on the green grass fields.

Stunning plumage and evocative calls - the Great Northern and Red-throated Divers breeding here take some beating; flocks of Arctic Terns called and perched all around us.

Our journey around Iceland took us to the north where we undertook a whale-watching trip which provided views of Minke and Humpback Whales and a good range of sea-birds. The wonderful Myvatn area provided a fitting climax to the tour with geo-thermal fumaroles, troll-infested larva escarpments, craters and pseudo craters and the very impressive waterfalls of Gullfoss and Dettifoss. The River Laxa proved popular with confiding Harlequin Ducks and Barrow's Goldeneye and the lake was a magnet for all things duck, Red-necked Phalaropes, gorgeous and very close Slavonian Grebes and plenty more.

Comfortable and warm hotels, an excellent road network and traditional Icelandic hospitality provided all the creature comforts we needed to fully exploit and explore the dramatic landscape and wildlife of Iceland.

Day 1

Friday 19th May

The journey for most of us began at Terminal 2 at Heathrow where guests and leaders caught the flight to Keflavik which arrived on time. The airport there has an unusual design whereby arrivals mix freely with those departing, but despite the apparent chaos we found Patricia, who had travelled from Ireland, gathered our luggage and sorted out two minibuses for our exciting excursion around Iceland. We managed to obtain our vehicles in the nick of time as huge queues quickly formed behind us from arrivals on later flights.

Our vehicles were automatic Volkswagen Caravels and after loading up we left the airport and drove for about twenty minutes to arrive at some shallow lagoons and commenced our birdwatching in earnest. Here we were

treated to our first Eiders, Pale-bellied Brent Geese, Greylag Geese, two Turnstones, two Black-tailed Godwit and plenty of Arctic Terns. For those who love their gulls, there was an excellent selection of Glaucous, Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed and Kittiwake lined up together. It was rather windy with intermittent showers alternating with sunny periods and the air temperature varied between 5°C – 7°C – typical Iceland spring temperatures! There was sufficient sunshine to enjoy rainbows. Two nearby Common Terns were unexpected and as we returned to our carriages and pushed on towards Reykjavik we began to see roadside Starlings.

Our first night's accommodation was to the east of the capital at Hotel Kruines which is situated on the shores of a large freshwater lake. Our evening meal just after 7pm consisted of such delights as mushroom or carrot soup, spring rolls, traditional Cod, beetroot burger and ice cream or cheesecake. It was delicious, but trying to enjoy our meal was difficult with all the distractions outside the dining room window – Great Northern Diver, Whooper Swans, Slavonian Grebe, Wigeon, Teal, Tufted Duck and Greater Scaup vied with Arctic Tern, Iceland Redpoll, White Wagtail and Meadow Pipit for our attention! There was even a couple of Barn Swallows swooping around the building. We met a huge dog in the car park belonging to the family who own the hotel – a friendly, if rather boisterous dog of St Bernard proportions, with a heavy, off-white soft coat – who loved playing games with his family and guests alike!

After a day of travel, it was time to retire, but with perpetual daylight outside and singing Redwings all around the hotel, sleep came more easily for some than others.

Day 2

Saturday 20th May

A 6.30am wander around the shores of the lake was taken in grey and breezy conditions and showers mixed with intermittent sunshine. Three Barn Swallows were in trees in a sheltered bay and birds were mostly repeats of those seen the previous evening with the addition of Redshank, Dunlin, Teal and Wheatear and a fly-over Golden Plover. Two pairs of Slavonian Grebe were on territory with one pair having already created the base for their floating nest.

With only one night's stay here, we ate our breakfast and were packed and ready to go by 9.30am. We quickly navigated onto Route 1 and headed east over the hills and past the thermal power station before dropping down to Hveragaeroi for a comfort stop. With plenty of miles to cover we continued east taking in the scenery on the way. Our next stop was to visit the waterfall at Seljandsfoss where there is a pay and display car park with good facilities and an opportunity for a hot drink and pastries. We spent about thirty minutes here watching the water cascading over the falls and the Fulmars wheeling all around.

Twenty-five minutes further on from here is another, even larger waterfall at Skogafoss which was our next venue. Here a Wren was heard and then seen in the car park, playing hide and seek around the cars and small bushes. More Fulmars wheeled in and out of the spray of the falls and we enjoyed our lunch in the nearby Bistro café in the Skogafoss Hotel. After lunch we continued on our journey and stopped at Dyrholaey, but the wind was strong and we didn't linger long in the rain and vicious gusts – although we did see Rock Doves, unidentified auks flying over the sea and Herring Gulls and Kittiwakes. We drove across to the other side of the large bay to the black sand beach at Reynisdranger where it was more sheltered and we could hold our binocular steady. Here there were distant Puffins on show but the inclement weather still made it difficult viewing. Lots of Fulmar and Kittiwakes and a few Common Guillemots were active in the windy, wet and turbulent conditions. The unmistakable fin of a

male Orca (Killer Whale) appeared only about 150 metres out from the beach, but despite much scanning and searching we didn't see him or his pod again.

We returned to our mini-buses and drove further east to the community of Vik where there was an opportunity for a comfort break and a little shopping. Then we continued until Claire shouted that she had seen something walking through a field of Lupins. We made an abrupt stop – and there was a white Arctic Fox clearly on the lookout for his next meal – brilliant!

It had been a long day of travelling when we finally arrived at our accommodation at the Hotel Skaftafell at 7.30pm, but not before we enjoyed a lovely view of a Red-throated Diver on its nest on a roadside pool.

Our main meal of the day was rather late at 8.15pm followed by our checklist and then it was time for some weary Naturetrekkers to consider sleep as their next option.

Day 3

Sunday 21st May

After the rigours of travelling for the first two days, the itinerary allowed us to relax a little as we were staying three nights at Skaftafell so that we could explore areas nearby.

Nevertheless, the day started with an optional 6.30am muster for a walk up the slope to a small glacial lake behind the hotel. It was still windy, but mostly dry on our first venture of the day as we enjoyed the sound of singing Redwings and drumming Snipe all around us. Chris and Alan had risen even earlier and had been rewarded with a photogenic Ptarmigan. The Lupins were not in flower yet, an indication of the relatively cool season so far, but they were tall enough to provide cover for birds nesting on or close to the ground. Other birds on our walk included Golden Plover, Tufted Duck, Black-headed Gull, Raven, Mallard, White Wagtail and Meadow Pipit.

We pottered back for our 8am breakfast and departed the hotel for our day excursion at 9.20am. Continuing east, forty minutes later we were at Jokulsarlon, the luminous-blue iceberg melt lake. Here the melting glacier calves spectacular lumps of blue-tinted ice which drift and melt on the lake before travelling out into the sea. We undertook a 35-minute amphibious tour on the lake – chugging around the bergs, marvelling at the fabulous formations and colours. A few Common Seals cavorted in the water, no doubt feeding on the fish that inhabit the swift-flowing channel from the lake to the sea. Accustomed to seeing people all the time, the birds here are fairly confiding and it was possible to be very close to singing Snow Buntings, Eiders and Arctic Terns.

By this time we had added rain to the cool temperatures, but this didn't stop some of our party walking alongside the channel, under the road-bridge and down to the spectacular 'Diamond Beach'. If the conditions are right, the smaller bergs that have been swept out to sea are then pushed back onto the beach by the waves. Large, transparent and often well-rounded 'polished' ice then slowly melts producing a stunning effect, particularly if the sunlight catches them on the black sand, hence the name 'Diamond Beach'. Birds around us included Arctic Skua, Great Skua, some Barnacle Geese, two first-year Iceland Gulls, Kittiwakes and a fly-over Long-tailed Duck.

We made some food and hot drink purchases in the kiosk nearby and ate in the min-buses avoiding the worst of the weather, then we drove around to the car park beside Diamond Beach to permit the rest of the party an opportunity to walk around the 'Diamonds' in the rain! Two Purple Sandpipers were playing hide and seek on the

channel breakwater and passing birds over the sea were Gannet and Red-throated Diver. Doing our best to stay well insulated and waterproof we drove just a few miles further east to the commune of Hali, a small village overlooking tidal mudflats and distant dunes by the sea. All around the village a thousand Arctic Terns were nesting in the fields – the sight and sound was absolutely wonderful despite the weather. They became even more excited whenever a Raven or two appeared intent on raiding the nests for eggs. Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese were here too, and waders included many Dunlin, Ringed Plovers, Oystercatchers, Whimbrel and Common Snipe sharing the fields with the sheep. Arctic and Great Skuas presided over the bathing Kittiwakes.

There was no improvement in the weather and with a few people now quite wet a decision was made to gently drive back west to the warmth of our hotel, arriving back at 4.30pm. This permitted a few hours of relaxation prior to our 7pm Naturetrek checklist and welcome 7.30pm evening meal and a briefing for the plans for the following day.

Day 4

Monday 22nd May

The weather was much improved, still windy, but sunny for most of the day. We enjoyed a pleasant 6.30am walk behind the hotel to the glacial lake with now familiar birds all around us being industrious at this, the start of the breeding season. Red-necked Phalaropes on a small pool were probably the highlight of the optional pre-breakfast wander.

After breakfast we departed at about 9.20am for the nearby attraction of Svartifoss – a walk in some woodland, a small waterfall to find and of course more opportunities to savour the impressive landscape and its features as well as the wildlife that calls it home. Goldcrests showed in some Spruce and a Wren was heard singing in the bushes. Common Snipe and White Wagtails showed well but the Iceland Redpolls were much more fidgety and hard to find. After making the circular walk there was an opportunity for a coffee at the visitors' centre, followed by a comfort break back at our hotel and the purchase of some rolls and snacks for a packed lunch from the shop opposite.

We then headed east again and interestingly it looked as if 'Diamond Beach' was empty of ice as we passed by. Our destination was Ingolfshöfi where a local farmer runs 'Puffin Safaris'. His once fertile farmland on the coastal plain was completely covered some 30 years ago when significant volcanic activity nearby covered the whole area with black lava sand and mud and all farming ceased. Thus the family turned to eco-tourism, ice cave tours and a café to earn their living.

We clambered aboard a farm trailer equipped with a few benches and hand-rails and were towed behind a tractor across the black sands to a distant promontory which is a designated nature reserve. Birds were few and far between initially but included Dunlin and Great Skuas. On reaching the headland we toiled up the steep black sand dunes and onto the island. Gulls, Fulmar and Great Skuas came by to check us out and we were briefed on the interesting history of the area. It remained blustery but sunny as we followed our guide around the headland and enjoyed some great close views of the often comical Puffins. Some landed on the cliff edges next to us, others whizzed past and settled a little further away. We walked around to a section of cliff which had jostling Razorbills and Common Guillemots below us. Normally there are one or two pairs of Brünnich's Guillemots here too, but it was too windy and unsafe to peer over the edge to look for them. Kittiwakes and other gulls were on the shoreline

below us as were a few Red-breasted Mergansers in the shallows. Raven croaked around us and a breeding colony of Great Skua became very agitated at our approach. A few Snow Buntings and Wheatears were the only passerines.

After our circular walk and photo opportunities it was time to scramble back down the dunes and clamber back aboard the trailer and enjoy the relatively smooth journey back – the end of our black sand adventure.

We decided we had earned a coffee-break and visited the family-run café nearby for welcome hot drinks and cake!! They even had a small colony of Arctic Terns nesting next to the car park!

Then we drove back to Skaftafell, but rather than going straight to the hotel we took a track just to the west and parked up next to the trail that provides a walk to the glacier above. Golden Plover and Whimbrel called as we walked up the slope to a spectacular viewpoint. From here there is a much better view of the glacier than the track we had used on our pre-breakfast walks, and we saw evidence of the distance the nose of the glacier has retreated in recent times and the resultant increase in the area of meltwater. Figures below us climbing the glacier provided a sense of scale and the blue skies and fast-moving clouds provided intermittent views of the high peaks all around.

The adventurous members of our party opted to walk back to hotel from here, but it proved slightly less straightforward than they imagined and took them a little longer than planned. The remainder returned to the buses with memories and images of a very special landscape, seen at its best in the sunshine.

With everyone safely back at the hotel, we enjoyed our evening meal, completed the checklist and discussion of the day and what to look forward to the following day!

Day 5

Tuesday 23rd May

Strong winds, but sunny for the most part with a few scattered showers and early morning drizzle was the weather for the day.

Our 6.30am wander took us along a new path from the hotel – along the flat heading east. Dave came across a photogenic Arctic Skua, but it sadly departed before the rest of us caught him up. Most of the birds were repeats of our days to date with Redwing, Meadow Pipits and Common Snipe being the most numerous. We took our last breakfast here before checking out and loading up at 9.20am. This was to be another day of travelling east but with numerous stops en-route and during the course of the day we saw an increasing number of geese in roadside fields and encountered Greylag, Pale-bellied Brent, Pink-footed and Barnacle.

Our first stop was at an alternative viewpoint overlooking the blue-iceberg lagoon from the west. We were virtually blown the short distance from the buses to the leeward side of a low bank from where we could shelter from the wind and scan the lagoon below. Keen eyes picked out two ducks just off the shore a little further on and despite the blustery conditions we were delighted to be watching the first Harlequin Ducks that everyone had had a chance to see. Dunlin and Snow-bunting were on territory and not wanting to fly in the extreme conditions and provided point-blank views to the point that we had to be careful not to step on them. Some Red-necked Phalaropes also delighted our happy throng of Naturetrekkers! Next, we visited Hali and again enjoyed the spectacle of the Arctic Terns and friends before continuing the journey along Route 1 to Hofu where we stopped for lunch in the excellent Z Bistro and checked out the adjacent harbour and pools. The very strong wind made birding difficult, and we

mostly stayed in the buses enjoying good views of a variety of waders, gulls and waterfowl and both Red-throated and Great Northern Divers.

However, with places to go, we moved on again and it wasn't long before Route 1 ran parallel to the coast, starting at the stark but spectacular headland and lighthouse at Hvaines, our next stop. Here the sea was alive with birds – Fulmars, Kittiwake, gulls, Eiders and a small variety of waders were moving south-west into the prevailing wind. Purple Sandpipers were found among the sheltered rocks and Gannets and both Arctic and Great Skua filtered past us.

Flocks of Whooper Swans and the iconic Icelandic Horses shared the best of the rich grassy fields, and we began to encounter small herds of the introduced Reindeer grazing in fields as we progressed further east.

Finally, at about 6pm we arrived at Hotel Fremtid at Djupivogur, our abode for just one night. With our evening meal not until 7.30pm there was time for the more energetic of the party to explore the super little peninsular and harbour next to the hotel and amongst other birds some summer plumage Red Knot were new for the trip.

After our dinner we completed our checklist and organised an optional walk for the following morning.

Day 6

Wednesday 24th May

It was still a very windy day, but again we had some sunshine, plus some snow too!

We started with a good hike around the peninsular at Djupivogur with birds to be seen at every step. A good variety of waders made our walk rather slow, particularly as the Purple Sandpipers and Red-necked Phalaropes were close, even if the wind did make photography something of a challenge. Breeding plumage Turnstone and Red Knot were a treat. Close Great Northern and Red-throated Divers plus Black Guillemots and more Harlequin Ducks were also admired and then it was time for breakfast and a re-pack as we moved on again.

The ultimate goal at the end of the day was to arrive at Mývatn with a scenic drive and stops en-route.

Driving away from Djupivogur in a northerly direction we encountered some more herds of Reindeer that were targeting the better quality grass in the meadows. We turned off Route 1 onto a minor mountain road (939) and began gaining altitude amongst some fabulous tortured rock formations. We took it nice and slow, stopping for scenic photographs and any wildlife which, being Iceland, is generally birdlife! Pink-footed Geese were in these uplands, but other birds were scarce with a few each of Golden Plover, Whimbrel and Black-tailed Godwit. At one point the strong wind was uplifting water from a stream providing a quick wash for one of the minibuses as it drove across a bridge! Driving through the wilderness it was surprising how many other vehicles were also on this minor road. Some of the fields were covered by longstanding snow to quite low levels.

Then our road took us back down onto Route 1 again as we drove north and then west and into Egilsstaðir where we stopped to purchase food for lunch and we stopped at a car park just outside this small town next to a bridge to eat our picnic, although it was much too chilly and windy to make use of the picnic benches there. Ravens flew past us several times and we left them a food treat on the rocks which I'm sure they found as soon as we left. Pushing further west the open landscape seemed barren and inhospitable but was nonetheless very dramatic. We

stopped at roadside pools and rivers to look at resplendent Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks and learnt to look for small white blobs on piles of rock which were sometimes Ptarmigan (and sometime nothing animate at all!). On our approach to the Mývatn area we stopped at Námafjall Hverir – an area of geo-thermal activity. Here it is possible to walk close to fumaroles and boiling mud pots creating sulphur crystals and of course the distinctive aroma. Wildlife is mostly absent in this environment, so it is an opportunity to relax from looking for birds and enjoy a little of Iceland's geothermal activity.

After less than an hour here we pushed on and arrived at Mývatn and an opportunity to witness yet another change to the landscape with a large freshwater lake, turquoise pools, pseudo-craters and eroded calderas. Mix in larva beds, small pockets of woodland and vegetated marshland and there was actually quite a variety of different habitat and volcanic features for us to explore in the coming days.

We pulled up at the Sel Hotel which is positioned right next to the lake and the best of the pseudo-craters, just after 4pm. After checking in for a three-night stay here we embarked on a cold and windy 5pm walk around the nearest section of the lake where we were introduced to incredibly close summer-plumage Slavonian Grebes, more Red-necked Phalaropes, a variety of ducks and more distant summer plumage Great Northern Divers. However, the rather hostile weather could not be ignored, and I think we were all relieved to retire back to the warm hotel just over an hour later.

We sat down and dutifully completed our checklists at 7pm, talked through the arrangements for the following day and walked into the restaurant at 7.30pm. There is a wonderful choice of food at this hotel, sometimes with the added option of a buffet. After our meal there was an opportunity to relax in the bar or for those with the energy, with continual daylight conditions, it was possible to go birdwatching at any time of night!

Day 7

Thursday 25th May

A cold, but dry day with sunshine and a reduction in the wind speed was very welcome and our busy day began with an optional 6.30am walk to the nearby church which is perched on top of a small hill, permitting excellent views over some secluded pools which are a favourite of the breeding wildfowl. There was also time to complete just a short section of the birdwatching trail around the lake prior to breakfast. This early excursion provided views of Barrow's Goldeneye, Greater Scaup, Tufted Duck, lots of bugling Long-tailed Ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers and whistling Wigeon. The soft quacking of Gadwall was a new sound for the trip, and we enjoyed close views of Common Snipe, Golden Plover and Black-tailed Godwits. A small pool right next to the hotel attracted a range of species during our stay, often also permitting close views of passerines such as Redwings, White Wagtails, Meadow Pipits and Icelandic Common Redpolls.

At 9.20am we set forth from the Sel Hotel to drive a couple of miles down the road to the bridge over the Yaxa River. This river is an important breeding site for many species of duck, particularly Barrow's Goldeneye and Harlequin. With patience and a little luck and good light it also provides an opportunity to be very close to truly appreciate and photograph their fabulous plumage. We enjoyed both species plus Long-tailed Ducks and the usual waders and then we motored on for about forty minutes to find the dramatic and very scenic waterfall at Godafoss. This allowed us all to stretch our legs on the walk along the river from the car park to the head of the falls and more landscape photographs, as well as photogenic birds such as Ptarmigan and Golden Plover. We visited the shop there and assorted facilities and then we took a slow drive to the coastal town of Húsavík, seeing more birds

en-route, arriving there at about 12.20pm. We plonked ourselves down in a café for a quick, hot light meal in preparation for our afternoon sailing on a whale-watching vessel.

We congregated down at the harbour and found our North Sailing vessel, listened to the briefing and struggled into our insulated and waterproof onesies! Once aboard the vessel we quickly left the harbour with its Black Guillemots and Iceland Gulls and headed out into the Skjalfandi Bay looking for seabirds and cetaceans. Looking south, there were plenty of Puffins on the water, scooting off on the approach of the boat. By looking north, it was possible to see the island they nest on some thirty kilometres away. A few Common Guillemots and Razorbills were also out on the water with Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes in attendance too and a few Arctic Skuas. We kept scanning the waters for a tell-tail 'blow' or other sign of a cetacean and were lucky enough to find a feeding Humpback Whale. In fact, there were at least two and maybe three and although we perhaps didn't get very close to these iconic sea mammals, we were still able to marvel at the sight as they surfaced, exhaled and dived again, showing that massive fluke preceding a particularly long and/or deep dive. Humpbacks are one of the darker whales which meant it was sometimes possible to see the dark body against the grey/blue sea at extreme range. However, the explosive sound of the 'blow' is generally what alerts whale-watchers to their presence. When they are busy feeding, they don't generally spend much time on the surface and these animals were doing precisely that.

A Minke Whale was also spotted and seen a couple of times, and this was wonderful as they tend to be quite shy and are harder to find, and three Harbour Porpoises buoyed up on a couple of occasions and gave typical views. In total we were out for just over three hours and enjoyed our hot chocolate drinks and cinnamon buns on the way back in!

Back at the harbour we de-robed and used the facilities (which can be a bit of a challenge in a tight onesy in the facilities on the boat!) and then returned to the buses and gently motored back to Mývatn arriving at the hotel for 6.30pm. We met for our 7.30pm main meal of the day and completed our briefing and checklist thereafter, already reminiscing about our whale adventure.

Day 8

Friday 26th May

Our last full day was to be spent around Mývatn and it began with the customary 6.30am walk, this time in an anti-clockwise circuit of the birding trail. It was rather grey and cool, but nothing stops the Common Snipe 'chirping' and 'drumming' above and around us. We enjoyed these and other waders and ducks, divers and Slavonian Grebes on our walk with Arctic Terns and Red-necked Phalaropes almost escorting us around sections of the main lake.

After breakfast we drove the short distance to Dimmuborgir, an impressive lava field which has a number of well-marked walks. We took one of the shorter walks which didn't provide much in the way of wildlife, but permitted a close appreciation of this volcanic phenomenon. Next was a good drive out to see the largest waterfall in Iceland – Dettifoss. The landscape here is starkly beautiful. We walked from the car park and some also took the option to walk to the nearby Selfoss Waterfall too. There were not many birds to see but Pink-footed Geese, Golden Plover and Northern Wheatear were the exception. This glacier-fed waterfall always impresses but in time we all gathered back at the mini-buses and it was nearing that very important time of day – lunchtime! We drove back towards Mývatn and stopped off at the Jarðbodin Baths – there are plans to enlarge this popular tourist venue, but the complex already has a very nice restaurant, so a meal was the first thing on the itinerary. Several of our group wished to take the plunge and experience open air bathing in the geothermal pools, so after dining the bathers

remained to take their swim and the rest of the group went off for an exploration of the north section of Lake Mývatn. Here we spotted an excellent selection of waterfowl intent on breeding which included Red-throated Diver, Slavonian Grebe, Greater Scaup, Barrow's Goldeneye, Long-tailed Ducks and Common Scoter. We also managed some relatively close views of Iceland Common Redpolls which included a couple of 'snowball white' birds looking more like Arctic Redpolls. At 3pm we returned to pick up our relaxed and happy bathers and the next choice was either an option visiting Hofdi for a woodland walk or walking up and around the rim of the crater of Hverfjall. A few of those climbing Hverfjall saw a pair of White-tailed Eagles, the only ones of the trip and two Short-eared Owls were seen with one of them flying over Hofdi. The short woodland walk at Hofdi traditionally provides good views of Redwing, Common Snipe and Iceland Common Redpoll and sometimes close views of ducks and divers and this did not disappoint.

By late afternoon we were back at our hotel with time to relax or take a further walk to the lake nearby, or drive and check out the birds on the Yaxa River.

That evening we again ate at the restaurant in the hotel, completed our administration and for most in the party planned for a return home the following day. The weather forecast for the final day suggested a sharp return to winter!

Day 9

Saturday 27th May

There was no early morning walk as we woke to a return of the cold winds and snow! After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and began the drive to the airport at Akureyri. En-route we were informed that there would be a delay to our internal flight to Reykjavik due to the weather, so with time in hand we decided that rather than take the tunnel route we would opt for the scenic mountain route. It was certainly scenic from the comfort of the minibuses, but wintery too and for part of the journey we followed a snowplough clearing the road ahead. Once at the airport we had a further wait for our flight and finally lifted off at around 12.20pm when the weather had improved slightly. On landing at Reykjavik, we had two more minibuses on standby which proved to be all-terrain Mercedes – which being high off the ground proved quite a challenge to climb into! With differing travel plans our band of Naturetrekkers began to split up with Lisa and Chris being dropped off in the capital, adding a quick dash to grab a quick view of the Blue Lagoon near Keflavik and dropping Patricia at the Aurora Hotel near the international airport.

And all of a sudden the Undiscovered Iceland tour for 2023 was over. Despite the generally cold and windy weather and occasional wet stuff, the true wonders of Iceland with its amazing landscapes and hardy wildlife had delighted everyone! Here's to the next time!



Iceland scenic by Lisa & Chris Hayes

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only, I=Introduced, GO = Guide only)

		May 2023									
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>			✓		✓	✓				
Pale-bellied Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	✓				1				✓	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>						✓		✓		
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>					✓		✓	✓		
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	2				2	✓	✓	✓		
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>		GO			2	✓	✓			
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>		✓				✓		✓		
Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>		✓	✓		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>							✓	✓		
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>					✓		1♂	1♀		
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>			2	3		2	✓	✓		
Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓				
Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>					✓	✓				
Sanderling	Calidris Alba					✓					
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>			2		✓	✓				
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>		GO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓	1		2	2	1		✓	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	✓				✓					
Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucoides</i>			2		✓		✓			
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	

		May 2023								
Common name	Scientific name	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓								
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓		✓			✓		
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>				✓			✓		
Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>					GO	✓	✓		
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓		✓			✓		
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		1	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	✓	2	1		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			✓	✓	✓		1		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>						1			
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>						1			
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>								2	
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>								2	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	3							
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				2					
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓		✓					
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓		✓					
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	
Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Others

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023							
		19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Arctic Fox	<i>Alopex lagopus</i>		1						
Common Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			✓		✓	✓		
Common Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>							1	
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>							2/3	
Orca (Killer Whale)	<i>Orcinus orca</i>		GO						
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>							3	
Reindeer - I	<i>Rangifer tarandus</i>					✓	✓		
Long-tailed Field Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>								1
Bumblebee sp.									
Lady's Mantle	<i>Alchemilla mollis</i>								
Lupin sp.									
Marsh Marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>								
Dandelion sp.									
Wood Anemone	<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>								
Angelica sp.									
Silver Birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>								
Lords-and-Ladies	<i>Arum maculatum</i>								
Cloudberry	<i>Rubus chamaemorus</i>								