

# ICELAND 7-16<sup>th</sup> July 1997

## General information

The following observations were made during a holiday trip to Iceland. Birdwatching wasn't the only purpose of our trip and we actually spent most of our time sightseeing and enjoying the islandic nature in general. Especially the geothermal activities like geysirs, solfatoes and lava fields got a lot of our attention and they shouldn't be missed by anybody visiting Iceland.

We flew from Copenhagen to Reykjavík with Icelandair and had only the first and the last nights booked in advance from Sweden. The rest of our accommodation we booked through the tourist office in Reykjavík, where it also is possible to get a lot of useful information about the country.

A Nissan Sunny was rented from Rás Car rental to the cost of 5000:- SEK for six days, including free mileage, CDW and local taxes. Our total driven distance was 2397 km. Petrol cost about 77:50 ISK/litre (100 ISK = about 11 SEK = 0:90 GBP).

When planning a trip around Iceland, you should be prepared of that even the main road is unpaved (and sometimes rather bad) for quite long parts in the north and the east, and that traveling often takes much longer than what you expect when looking at a map.

## Itinerary

### 7 th July

Flew from Copenhagen at 19.30 and arrived at Keflavik international airport at 20.50 local time (-2 hours compared with Sweden). Took the airport-bus to Reykjavík and the Egilsborg guesthouse where we stayed the following three nights. Price: 6300:- ISK per night for a double room, including breakfast.

### 8th-9th July *Rather sunny with scattered clouds*

Sightseeing in Reykjavík. Visited Tjörnin, a small lake in the center of the town where some ducks and breeding Arctic Terns were seen, and the harbour, where about 30 summering immature Glaucous Gulls were found.

### 10th July *Overcast and rain most of the day*

Got our car delivered in the morning and drove around the southwestern parts. Visited Þingvellir at the northern end of Lake Þingvallavatn, the Geysir-area, and the waterfall at Gullfoss, where a immature Gyr Falcon performed very nicely close to the parking lot.

Continued to Grindavík where we took a bath in the "Blue lagoon" and where we also switched to another car at the Rás Car office as the first one didn't run very good. Visited the Reykjanes-peninsula in the evening but thick fog made all birdwatching meaningless. Back in Reykjavík at 21.00.

386 km during the day.

11th July *Rain and low clouds all day*

Left Reykjavík in the morning and drove along the coast to Ólafsvik on the tip of the Snæfellsnes peninsula. Stopped at Medalfallsvatn (signposted, not far from the main road), where two Great Northern Divers and eight Harlequin Ducks were seen. Visited the birdcliffs at Malarrif in the evening.

Stayed at the Höfði guesthouse in Ólafsvik where we paid 6000:- ISK for a double room, including breakfast. 338 km during the day.

12th July *Rain until lunchtime, sunny in the afternoon*

Along the northern parts of the Snæfellsnes peninsula on rather bad dirt roads. Reached Blönduós at lunchtime where a lot of birds were seen in the bay together with a distant whale. At the mouth of a small river in Blönduós a few summering Iceland Gulls, the only ones of the trip, were found. Continued eastwards and reached Mývatn at 18.40 and were welcomed by a small party of Barrow's Goldeneyes close to shore, just along the road.

Stayed two nights at the very nice Birkihraun guesthouse in Reykjahlíð at the northeastern corner of the lake to the cost of 5800:- ISK per night, including breakfast.

541 km driven during the day.

13th July *Sunny until late afternoon, then some rain showers*

Spent most of the day visiting the volcanic and geothermal areas east of Mývatn. Birded a few hours around the lake in the afternoon, with impressing numbers of ducks as result. The greatest surprise was a male American Wigeon together with some Eurasian Wigeons in the southeastern corner of the lake. 106 km during the day.

14th July *Rain and low clouds all day*

Birding around the western shore of Mývatn until 08.00. Left the area after breakfast and drove via Egilstaðir to Höfn where we checked in at the Árnanes guesthouse in the evening. A very pleasant place with an excellent restaurant, where we paid 5700:- ISK for a double room including breakfast. Highly recommended! 474 km during the day.

15th July *Low clouds and some rain showers, clearing up in the afternoon*

Drove along the coast with stops at the glacier lake Jökulsárlón and on the sandy plains Breiðmerkursandur and Skeiðarársandur. Large numbers of breeding Great Skuas and Arctic Skuas, in some places close to the road. Visited the nice bird cliffs at Dyrhólaey, about 15 km west of Vík, in the afternoon. Back in Reykjavík at 20.00. where we stayed the last night at the Egilsborg Guesthouse again. 550 km driven during the day.

16th July *Sunny and warm*

Left Iceland at lunchtime and were back home in Malmö in the evening.

Totally 61 species were seen on Iceland.

## List of species:

### **Red-throated Diver** - *Gavia stellata*

Rather common. Highest count: 10 Jökulsárlón 15.7

### **Great Northern Diver** - *Gavia immer*

1 pair with two chicks in the northern part of Þingvallavatn 10.7, 2 Medalfallsvatn 11.7, 1 pair with one chick Ólafsvik-Grundarfjörður 12.7, 1 Blönduós 12.7, 1 Másvatn 12.7, at least 3 Mývatn 13-14.7

### **Slavonian Grebe** - *Podiceps auritus*

At least 20 Mývatn 13-14.7. Only other observations: 1 with chicks in a small pond along the road on the southern part of the Snæfellsnes peninsula 11.7 and 1 NW Breiðalsvík 14.7.

### **Fulmar** - *Fulmarus glacialis*

Very common and numerous

### **Northern Gannet** - *Morus bassanus*

About 200 around a breeding colony west of Dyrhólaey 15.7

### **Shag** - *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

2 W of Grundarfjörður 12.7

### **Whooper Swan** - *Cygnus cygnus*

Common. Numerous along the south-eastern coast with largest congregation consisting of at least 2500 (!) in the lagoon SW of Hvalnes 14.7.

### **Greylag Goose** - *Anser anser*

30 Mývatn 13.7, 125 Álfafjörður 14.7, about 500 in the lagoon SW of Hvalnes 14.7.

### **Eurasian Wigeon** - *Anas penelope*

About 300 Mývatn 13-14.7

### **American Wigeon** - *Anas americana*

1 male in the south-eastern part of Mývatn, associating with Eurasian Wigeons 13.7  
Rare visitor, 53 birds recorded 1979-94.

### **Gadwall** - *Anas strepera*

15-20 Mývatn 13-14.7. Only other observation was 1 male at Tjörnin, Reykjavík 9.7.

### **Common Teal** - *Anas crecca*

About 10 Mývatn 13-14.7, 1 Álfafjörður 14.7, 5 Árnanes, W Höfn 15.7.

### **Mallard** - *Anas platyrhynchos*

Rather common

### **Tufted Duck** - *Aythya fuligula*

Very common at Mývatn (1000++) 13-14.7. Small numbers elsewhere.

**Greater Scaup** - *Aythya marila*

Rather common. Numerous (1000?) Mývatn 13-14.7.

**Common Eider** - *Somateria mollissima*

Common. Large flocks of moulting males along the Snæfellsnes peninsula.

**Harlequin Duck** - *Histrionicus histrionicus*

2 females along road 35, about 10 km S of Geysir 10.7, 6 males + 2 females at the outlet of Medalfallsvatn 11.7, 1 female about 25 km N of Borgarnes 11.7, 1 female W Grundarfjörður 12.7, 3 adult males + 2 second-year males + 12 females (three females with 4, 5 and 6 chicks respectively) Laxá-delta, Mývatn 13.7.

**Long-tailed Duck** - *Clangula hyemalis*

7 Blönduós 12.7, 13 Mývatn 13.7.

**Common Scoter** - *Melanitta nigra*

4 Másvatn 12.7, 7 Mývatn 13.7.

**Barrow's Goldeneye** - *Bucephala islandica*

About 70 Mývatn 13-14.7

**Red-breasted Merganser** - *Mergus serrator*

10 Mývatn 13-14.7

**Merlin** - *Falco columbarius*

1 Vagustadir, SW Höfn 15.7, 1 Sólheimarjökull 15.7

**Gyr Falcon** - *Falco rusticolus*

1 immature Gullfoss 10.7, 1 adult 4 km S of the Krafla powerstation, Mývatn 13.7

**Ptarmigan** - *Lagopus mutus*

1 along the road at Jökuldalsheiði, W of Egilstaðir 14.7

**Oystercatcher** - *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common along the coast

**Great Ringed Plover** - *Charadrius hiaticula*

Common along the coast

**European Golden Plover** - *Pluvialis apricaria*

Common

**Red Knot** - *Calidris canutus*

20 adults Hvammsfjörður 12.7

**Sanderling** - *Calidris alba*

9 Breiðdalsvík 14.7, 30 Dyrhólaey 15.7

**Purple Sandpiper** - *Calidris maritima*

2 Ólafsvík 11.7, 1 Rif 11.7, 1 W of Grundarfjörður 12.7, 20 Hvammsfjörður 12.7

**Dunlin** - *Calidris alpina*

Widespread but normally seen in small numbers. Largest flocks: 115 Breiðdalsvík 14.7, 120 Alftafjörður 14.7, 630 Stokksnes 15.7

**Common Snipe** - *Gallinago gallinago*

Common

**Black-tailed Godwit** - *Limosa limosa islandica*

Rather common in the southern parts and common in the Mývatn area.

**Whimbrel** - *Numenius phaeopus*

Common

**Common Redshank** - *Tringa totanus*

Common

**Red-necked Phalarope** - *Phalaropus lobatus*

Common. Largest numbers: 275 Rif 11.7, 200 Grænavatn, S of Mývatn 13.7

**Arctic Skua** - *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Rather common. Numerous on the sandy areas along the southern coast between Höfn and Selfoss. About 80 along the road Breiðamerkursandur-Hvolsvöllur 15.7.

Birds of the dark morph seem to dominate.

**Great Skua** - *Catharacta skua*

3 Blönduós 12.7, 1 Mývatn 14.7, 1 Breiðdalsvík 14.7, 3 Höfn 15.7, About 100 Breiðamerkursandur-Vík, with several pairs breeding close to the road 15.7, 10 Dyrhólaey 15.7.

**Black-headed Gull** - *Larus ridibundus*

Common

**Common Gull** - *Larus canus*

1 Hvalfjörður 11.7, 3 along the road between Blönduós-Akureyri 12.7, 2 Breiðdalsvík 14.7, 1 SW of Höfn 15.7.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** - *Larus fuscus graellsii*

Common in the south-western parts. Less numerous elsewhere.

**Herring Gull** - *Larus argentatus argenteus*

Singles around Reykjavík and on the Snæfellsnes peninsula, common along the eastern coast between Breiðdalsvík and Vík.

**Iceland Gull** - *Larus glaucoides*

3 first-summer and 1 second-summer Blönduós 12.7

**Glaucous Gull** - *Larus hyperboreus*

About 30 immatures Reykjavík harbour 8-9.7, 3 adults and 20 immatures Hvalfjörður 11.7, common on the Snæfellsnes peninsula (100+), mostly adults 11-12.7, about 10 Blönduós 12.7, 3 immatures W of Breiðdalsvík 14.7, 4 immatures Árnanes, W of Höfn 15.7.

Hybrids Glaucous x Herring Gull: 1 immature Hvalfjörður 11.7, 1 immature Árnanes, W of Höfn 15.7.

**Great Black-backed Gull** - *Larus marinus*

Singles around Reykjavík, common along the northern and eastern coasts.

**Kittiwake** - *Rissa tridactyla*

Numerous but not counted on the outer parts of the Snæfellsnes peninsula - large breeding colonies at Malarrið 11.7. Large numbers around breeding colony at Dyrhólaey 15.7, singles elsewhere.

**Arctic Tern** - *Sterna paradisaea*

Very common.

**Common Guillemot** - *Uria aalge*

Recorded at breeding colonies at Malarrið (some 100-eds) 11.7 and at Dyrhólaey (100+) 15.7.

**Brünnich's Guillemot** - *Uria lomvia*

Numerous (100?) at the bird cliffs at Malarrið 12.7.

**Razorbill** - *Alca torda*

About 50 Malarrið 12.7, about 20 Dyrhólaey 15.7.

**Black Guillemot** - *Cepphus grylle*

Only observation was of 3 along the road W of Hvalnes 14.7.

**Atlantic Puffin** - *Fratercula arctica*

A few Hvalfjörður 11.7, 5 Malarrið 11.7, numerous at sea off Blönduós 12.7, numerous (1000?) at the bird cliffs at Dyrhólaey 15.7.

**Common Swift** - *Apus apus*

5 Berufjörður 14.7.

Rare but annual visitor, 164 birds recorded 1979-94.

**Meadow Pipit** - *Anthus pratensis*

Common

**Pied Wagtail** - *Motacilla alba*

Rather common

**Wren** - *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Singing birds heard at Þingvellir and along the river Sóg, N of Selfoss 10.7.

**Northern Wheatear** - *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Rather common

**Redwing** - *Turdus iliacus*

Common

**Common Raven** - *Corvus corax*

Rather common

**Common Starling** - *Sturnus vulgaris*

Rather common in the southwest and on the Snæfellsnes peninsula. Not recorded elsewhere.

**Snow Bunting** - *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Rather common

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