

Iceland

9rd - 25th July 2010 – Chris Barlow



Front cover pictures: Gullfoss Waterfall, Puffin, Arctic Skua, Jostedal Ice Lagoon, Katla Mudpools, Fulmar, Red necked Phalarope, Detifoss Waterfall

A family holiday travelling round the whole of the Country on route one with plenty of opportunities to birdwatch but not necessarily time to linger.

9th July

Arctic Terns, Snow Buntings and both Great and Arctic Skuas seen from the plane while still on the runway !

10th July

The 'tourist trail' round the most popular areas. The most striking thing here, as with most of the trip was the lack of fear that the birds have, at Kerrid it was literally possible to trip over the Golden Plovers if you weren't paying attention. The journey to the powerful Gulfoss waterfall also gave our first ever views of a Red necked Phalarope with over 40 in a single flock on the river. Just after finding a Great Northern Diver with young at Pflingvellir the torrential rain set in and the ensuing darkness made it impossible to identify a group of ducks diving in the river.



Golden Plover at Kerrid Crater

11th July

Started the day at the Floi nature reserve car park at Stakkholt near Eyrarbakki . Wading through knee deep grass following the first part of the trail seemed like a good idea and the soaked feet were worth it for the close views of Red Throated Diver and Red Necked Phalaropes it provided, the Diver nearly knocking me off the path as I was in its way coming in to land on its pond. Short eared Owls hunting in the middle of the day were a common sight in the first few days. This was a long driving day however so the opportunity to wait for the sun to break through was not possible but by the time we got to Skogafoss the light was good enough to take pictures of the Fulmars sweeping across the front of the waterfall. At Dyrholaey the weather was now glorious and the first of many vast Seabird colonies with all the common Auks in their thousands before pushing onto the Skaftafell National Park for two nights.



Fulmar at Skogafoss Waterfall

12th & 13th July

On the 12th under the Skaftafell glaciers the numbers of Redwing picked up and we saw our first Ptarmigan. A trip to Ingolfshofdi on the back of a tractor saw us on an escorted trip on the island and after threading our way through the Great Skua colony we were rewarded with a first Brunnich's Guillemot, the guide happily setting up his tripod right on the edge of a 200ft cliff to catch a glimpse, a challenge for those with a fear of heights! The 13th saw an early walk in the dwarf birch forest with singing Icelandic Wrens, Redwings and an unfamiliar song in the dense trees was only identified much later at home as a Brambling. The Jökullarson Ice Lagoon gave further close up views of Great and Arctic Skuas, Eiders and more Snow Buntings. An evening arrival in Djúpivogur saw hundreds of Fulmars feeding by the fish processing plant but dense fog descended before the area could be explored.



Icelandic Wren - Skaftafell

14th to 16th July

The Sun returned in the morning and the newly established nature reserve to the south of Djupivogur contained dozens of Red necked Phalarope's on a single roadside puddle, until a Great Skua flushed them. The site also gave rare opportunities for the UK birder to see Wigeon, Teal, Pintail and Greater Scaup all with young and several pairs of Great Northern Divers. The return of the fog and drizzle over the fjords made the first stint of gravel road driving a challenge but a Merlin landed on a road sign 20 feet from where we were parked only for the first 3 cars we had seen all day to come down the hill behind us and flush it before a photograph could be taken. Arriving at Bakkagerdi a quick trip to the harbour failed to uncover the male Stellar's Eider that had been there since 1994 (although seen the previous day he failed to show anywhere in the area for the next 3). The harbour did however contain, Black tailed Godwit, White Wagtail, Long Tailed Duck, Black Guillemot and another Iceland speciality the Harlequin Duck with 20 in various stages of moult. Rain and low cloud prevented a trip into the mountains with the local guide who knew where a Snowy Owl had set up a Summer territory so many unsuccessful hours were spent looking for Stellar.



17th to 20th July

Heading off the tourist trail we headed to the far north and Raufarhofn, visited by the Bird Club trip back in 2005. The female Stellar's Eider seen on that trip was still in residence at Bilkalon and in this area we also saw summer plumaged Purple Sandpipers with young. We followed the northern route round through Husavik to Lake Myvatn, Husavik harbour providing the first views of an adult Glaucous Gull. It is hard to get across the sheer numbers of ducks in this area and it was here that we found another speciality bird, Barrow's Goldeneye, or more precisely 150 males in a huge moulting flock! All duck species were found in this area, along with more Red Necked Phalarope's and dozens of Slavonian Grebes, all of which were fearless and in many cases came to check you out if you were sat on the lake side. The pseudocraters on the south side provided stunning views of Great Northern Divers who swam over to have a look at me sat on the lake side then went on to feed their youngsters in front of us. Whooper Swans had cygnets here as well. The trip to the Dettifoss waterfall, Europe's most powerful waterfall took us across a barren 'moonscape' but even here Arctic Skuas and Snow Buntings were in evidence and the tantalising hints of a Gyrfalcon in the area with a partially eaten Ptarmigan near the car park.



20th July

Passing the Gulfoss waterfall and lunching near Akureyi, the botanical gardens were home to rare Icelandic birds with Starlings and 'Icelandic' Redpoll, another in the bewildering array of variations in this species, noticeably larger and darker plumaged than its UK cousins.



21st July

Back to back driving days to reach Stykissholmur on the Snafelles peninsular, birds were relatively scarce in this section. Once on the peninsular Glaucous Gulls were by far the commonest Gull in this region.

22nd to 24th July



A trip to the westernmost tip of Snaefelles, Öndverðarnes and after carefully easing to the cliff edge near the southern lighthouse (not for anyone with a fear of heights) it was possible to get close views of good numbers of Brunich's Guillemots, on this stretch of cliff, Svortuloft, they outnumbered Common Guillemot.

A return visit on the 24th with better light enabled some photography and at the northern lighthouse an Arctic Fox was right out on the shoreline.



Brunnich's Gulliemot, Svortuloft Cliffs

The pond near Rif has nearly legendary status regarding Red necked Phalarope and did not disappoint, all the 'spots' on the picture below are Phalaropes and this is just one end of the pool! Two very curious Black-tailed Godwits kept running over the road to the bird screen staring at you then running off again so we didn't linger in case there were young in the area.



Over 200 Phalaropes (and 2 Dunlin) – part of Rif Pond

One of the 'curious' Black-tailed Godwits



24th July

The final day took us from Hellnar to the Blue Lagoon south of Reykjavik via Garður, where hundreds of Manx Shearwaters and Gannets were seen flying past the point.

Species List - 53

Great Northern Diver –Pvingvellir on 10th, Lake Myvatyn calling and feeding young on 17th to 20th



Great Northern Diver – Lake Myvatn

Red Throated Diver – 4 at Floi on 11th, also one with 2 young at Kopasker on 17th

Slavonian Grebe - Very common around Lake Myvatn



Slavonian Grebe – Lake Myvatn

Manx Shearwater - Offshore from Gardhur ponds near Keflavik lighthouse.

Gannet - Offshore from Gardhur ponds near Keflavik lighthouse.

Whooper Swan -Pair with young at Lake Myvatn

Greylag Goose - Lake Myvatn

Eurasian Wigeon - Djupivogur & Lake Myvatn

Eurasian Teal

Mallard

Pintail – female with young Lake Myvatn

Shoveler– female with young Lake Myvatn

Tufted Duck

Greater Scaup – Hofn harbour & Djupivogur

Common Eider

Steller’s Eider - One female was at Bilkalon with Common Eiders.

Long-tailed Duck – Female with young at Lake Myvatn

Barrow’s Goldeneye – Moulting flock of c150 males at the south east corner of Lake Myvatn, Females with young

Ptarmigan – rarely seen, singles at Skaftafell National Park, Dimmuborgir and one with young at Katla volcano

Merlin – Seen twice, Bakkagerdi and south of Husavik

European Golden Plover – Everywhere

Purple Sandpiper– Common, the most northerly bird seen on the trip at the Hraunhafnartangi lighthouse

Dunlin – numerous

Snipe - common, displaying throughout day and night from any vantage point, including vehicles in the hotel car park



Snipe – Lake Myvatn from approximately 5 feet away

Black-tailed Godwit – Bakkagerdi & Rif particularly good for these birds

Whimbrel – everywhere, standing on the tops of fence posts, road signs, telegraph poles etc



Whimbrel at Bakkagerdi

Common Redshank

Ruddy Turnstone

Red-necked Phalarope – over 200 on the pool at Rif. Seen daily with excellent views at Lake Myvatn and Djupivogur



Red-necked Phalarope at Djupivogur

Arctic Skua – common, even miles inland, mostly dark phase birds but some pale

Great Skua – not as common as Arctic's predominantly seen on south coast

Common Gull

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Herring Gull

Glaucous Gull – common on the Snaefelles peninsula, adult and juvenile birds



An optimistic Glaucous Gull in Olafsvik Harbour

Great Black-backed Gull

Kittiwake – Common

Arctic Tern – huge colonies everywhere, birds nesting right beside the road in some places.

Common Guillemot - Common along south coast especially Ingolfshofdi, small numbers on the Svortuloft cliffs

Brunnich's Guillemot – 1 on the cliffs at Ingolfshofdi, outnumbered Commons on Svortuloft cliffs on Snaefelles

Black Guillemot – Best views at Bakkagerdi

Razorbill – As Common Guillemot

Puffin – seemed to be present at every coastal location

Short Eared Owl – hunting all times of the day in the farmland belt east of Reykjavik

Meadow Pipit

White Wagtail– harbour at Bakkagerdi (had a UK ring on but unable to read it)

Wren – Icelandic subspecies, singing at Skaftafell National Park

Northern Wheatear

Redwing

Raven

Common Starling – only seen at the botanic gardens in Akureyri

Redpoll – Icelandic/Greenland subspecies - only seen at the botanic gardens in Akureyri

Snow Bunting