

Iceland Winter

23–26 February 2015

Participants

Peter and Gudrun Berndt

John Birtwell

Alan Peters

Leader Andy Jones



Common Redpoll

Day 1 Brisk north wind with temperatures around -5°C . We assembled at Keflavík airport and were soon on our way. Just a few kilometres from the airport we saw a Gyrfalcon perched on a lamp post. It was very obliging and we had good views of the bird before it flew away across the lava fields. We reached our guesthouse in Hveragerði, enjoyed a delicious dinner and discussed our plans for the days ahead.

Day 2 Cold north wind with temperatures around -5°C . Snow showers later. We saw some Common Redpolls of the Icelandic race as we left the guesthouse. We explored some nearby hot springs and saw several Northern Ravens. Near Sogið we found four Barrow's Goldeneyes on the river. They were some distance away so we drove closer and got some good views. We also noted Goosander, Mallard and Whooper Swans nearby. Further upstream we struck it lucky as on a small lake we were rewarded with some wonderful views of more Barrow's Goldeneyes. There was a small group of males and we are treated to the 'bobbing' display. There were also Tufted Ducks here. We saw a Slavonian Grebe close to shore. There were more Barrow's Goldeneyes downstream and we also noted Red-breasted Merganser. After lunch we visited the geothermal area of Geysir and enjoyed watching the eruptions of the geyser. We had a quick visit to the dramatic falls of Gullfoss before heading for a quick visit to the south coast near Strandarkirja. On the way we saw two Merlins and had a decent view of the second bird perched on a fence post. It was snowing heavily when we reached the coast and the visibility was poor but we saw several Harlequin Ducks offshore. There were also Eurasian Wigeons, Common Eiders and a few Purple Sandpipers here. After dinner the skies partly cleared and we set off in search of an aurora but sadly had no luck.

Day 3 Very strong east winds measured at more than 35 m/s. Snow, sleet and rain. We didn't have a promising start to the day weather-wise and there was a severe weather warning in force. Nevertheless we started the day with a walk in the shelter of some nearby woods and looking towards the cliffs seeing several Northern Fulmars seemingly untroubled by the gales. We searched unsuccessfully for Common Redpolls before retreating for shelter and hot coffee. Later the winds dropped a little and we travelled to the coast at Þorlákshöfn and in the sheltered harbour enjoyed watching a group of 20 or so Long-

tailed Ducks. We had some great views. We also had the chance to see the differences between Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, to watch Black Guillemots and Great Northern Diver, and were amazed at the numbers of gulls around us. As we drive along the coast road we saw a small flock of Snow Buntings and, using the car as a hide, had some good views of Harlequin Ducks. We saw some Northern Gannets offshore as well. Parts of the foreshore are frozen but on some open water we enjoyed watching a group of Whooper Swans. By now the weather was deteriorating with heavy, wind-driven rain as we approached Eyrarbakki, but we saw more Iceland Gulls, Red-breasted Mergansers, Long-tailed Ducks and Common Eiders. We explored the coast at Stokkseyri but the weather gets the best of us and we head for shelter at the guesthouse. Cloudy skies mean no chance of an aurora tonight.

Day 4 Cold north wind with temperatures around -3°C . Our first stop was at a small lake near Reykjavík where, amongst a group of Tufted Ducks, we found a Hooded Merganser, a rare vagrant to Iceland. We also saw Red-breasted Merganser, Goosander and Whooper Swan. We explored the harbour and coast around Reykjavík and added Razorbill and European Shag to the list. We also saw a Common Gull and several Black-headed Gulls here. We had a cold spell of birding near the lighthouse but we were rewarded with more Long-tailed Ducks close inshore. After lunch we head for the coast near Keflavík and finished the trip birdwatching here. We were amazed by the enormous numbers of Northern Fulmars and Black-legged Kittiwakes flying past far offshore. There were tens of thousands of birds. Sadly now the trip was over so we said our farewells, and headed for the airport and the return flight to the UK.

Thanks very much to all participants for your company and I hope we'll meet on another Birdfinders trip again one day.

Andy Jones
February 2015

Species	Scientific name
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>
Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>
Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>
Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Hooded Merganser	<i>Mergus cucullatus</i>
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>
Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>

Species	Scientific name
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
Gyr Falcon	<i>Falco rusticolus</i>
Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Common Gull	<i>Larus canis</i>
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucoides</i>
Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>
Feral Pigeon/Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>
Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>