

Trip report Iceland 15-18 March 2007
By Svend Aage Linderström

The new issue is to visit Iceland in March. The weather is unpredictable but temperatures may be a little higher than central Scandinavia. For some 850 euro my wife Dorthe and I got a prolonged weekend in Reykjavik including flight by Iceland Express, half board at Cabin Hotel (except for one night where we had diner in town) and a rental car by Budget including insurances and free kilometres as a special offer by Hekla Travel.

Don't expect to find anything cheap on Iceland. Petrol 1,40 euro a litre, lunch for two at a burger bar 30 euro and diner – a two course thai meal – 115 euro.

That said Iceland is beautiful and Reykjavik is a modern town dominated by lots of new building as economy is at a peak.

However it is possible to do some good birding in and around Reykjavik and March is a perfect time of the year if you want to find Barrow's Goldeneye close to Reykjavik.

Itinerary and sites visited

Thursday 15 March 2007

Left Copenhagen Kastrup airport 12.30 (GMT -1) and arrived in Keflavik 14.30 (GMT), got our rental car immediately – a Toyota Yaris (that's how you can recognize a tourist) and left the airport 15.05 heading north to Gardur at the point of Reykjanes Peninsula, arriving 15.15. Main target was the long staying Black Duck – present since 1993 – which we found in the lakes north of the harbour – also good numbers of Iceland Gull here. We went further north to the light house and point Gardskagi where we found Great Northern Diver, Shag, Purple Sandpiper and Little Auk. Left Gardur 16.10, short stop at Vogar 16.25-16.40, found a female King Eider in the harbour. Arrived in Reykjavik 17.10, walked along the waterfront east of the harbour 17.25-18.40, saw a few Black Guillemots showing all plumages.

Weather : SW 10 m/s, overcast 8/8, visibility > 10 km, showers, 1-3 C. Sunrise 7.49, sunset 19.27.

Friday 16 March

Walked the waterfront in the morning 7.50-8.40. Then we started driving the famous Golden Circle, crossing a snow covered Tingvellir 9.30-10.40. Due to snowfall it was hard to find a lay by anywhere, and all vehicles we met were either busses or 4WD which made good sense as the road was covered with snow and ice. Anyway the road from Tingvellir to Geysir and Gullfoss was closed as at least 6 inches of snow covered the road. Instead we headed south toward Sellfoss. The first place we were able to stop was the power station at Steingrimsstöð at lake Ullfjötuvatn which turned out to be a good choice as a male Barrow's Goldeneye was swimming side by side with a male Harlequin Duck in the stream. Some more Barrow's Goldeneyes were found in the lake, a female gave good views next to the powerstation. 10.50-11.15. Had a short stop at River Sog at a bridge a little north of Sellfoss, a pair of Barrow's Goldeneye was present in the river.

Went back to Reykjavik, birded the harbour and city. A Gyr Falcon crossed the harbour, where Iceland Gulls were abundant. In the city centre Lake Tjörnin is good for Greylag Goose, Whooper Swan and ducks – a Ringbilled Gull should be present, but we had no luck. 12.30-16.15.

Weather : WNW 10, 6-8/8, > 10, showers, -3-2 C

Saturday 17 March

Birded the water front 7.35-8.30, then the harbour 9.20-10.25 and finally the largest forest on Iceland found at Perlan in the south western suburbs of Reykjavik 10.35-11.05. We intended to explore Reykjanes and had a short stop west of Hafnafjörður 11.20-11.30, next stop at the Blue Lagoon 11.50-12.10 then Grindavik 12.10-13.05. The wind was increasing and as we left Grindavik snow began. We stopped at Hafnir watching a group of 42 Harlequin Ducks in the small harbour 13.25-13.50. We found at least some shelter behind a building as the weather now had turned into a snow gale. Headed north to Keflavik and returned to Reykjavik – a rather unpleasant drive as we witnessed two car crashes due to slippery roads – fortunately we returned safely. However in the afternoon weather changed, sun was shining and we had a walk in the Botanical Garden 16.00-17.15.

Sunday 18 March

Had a slow return toward Keflavik airport. First stop Ellidavatn a lake in the south eastern suburbs of Reykjavik. Unfortunately due to snow fall the roads in the area were not passable in a two wheel drive. Lesser Scaup and Ringnecked Duck had been reported in this area recently. Anyway the lake was partly covered with ice and ducks were few 8.30-8.55. We decided to get close to the airport having a stop at Sandgerdi 9.30-10.00 and then back to Gardur 10.05-10.50, where we couldn't find the Black Duck. Birded the harbour of Keflavik 10.55-11.45, got excellent views of another Gyr Falcon. The wind was bitterly cold, so we returned to the airport 11.55. Our plane left 15.45 and 19.30 we were back in Copenhagen airport.

Weather : WNW 15, 4-8/8, > 25 km, dry, -6 - -2 C.

Birdlist

Redthroated Diver *Gavia stellata*

1 Vogar and 1 Keflavik

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

1 Gardur and 1 Hafnir

Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

600 Gardur, 2 Vogar, 800 Reykjavik, 20 Grindavik, 20 Hafnir, 200 Sandgerdi and 20 Keflavik

Gannet *Morus bassana*

4 Gardur

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

10 Gardur, 220 Reykjavik, 15 Grindavik, 4 Hafnir, 14 Sandgerdi and 4 Keflavik

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

8 Gardur and 12 Grindavik

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

5 Reykjavik harbour, 86 Tjörnin, 42 Lake Ellidavatn and 4 Sandgerdi

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

2 Tingvellir, 2 Reykjavik harbour, 140 Tjörning and 110 Botanical Garden

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

48 Gardur

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

1 pair Hafnafjörður

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

22 Gardur, 12 Vogar, 220 Tjörning, 2 Reykjavik harbour, 220 Botanical Garden, 4 hafnafjörður, 1 hafnir, 2 Ellidavatn and 4 Sandgerdi

American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*

15/3 1 drake Gardur

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

8 Tjörnin and 2 Ellidavatn

Scaup *Aythya marila*

1 female Tjörnin and 1 drake Ellidavatn

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*

300 Gardur, 30 Vogar, 3 Tjörnin, 600 Reykjavik harbour, 4.000 Grindavik, 400 Hafnir, 600 Sandgerdi and 200 Keflavik

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*

1 female Vogar harbour 15/3

Harlequin Duck *Histromicus histromicus*

1 male Steingrimsstöð, Lake Ullfjötuvatn, 42 Hafnir harbour and 2 Sandgerdi harbour

Longtailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

2 Vogar, 8 Reykjavik harbour, 12 Hafnir and 18 Sandgerdi

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*

12 Lake Ullfjötuvatn at Steingrimsstöð and 2 River Sog near Sellfoss

Redbreasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

2 Gardur, 2 Vogar, 4 Tingvellir, 12 Ullfjötuvatn, 40 Reykjavik, 4 Tjörnin, 20 Hafnir, 4 Ellidavatn and 10 Sandgerdi

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

1 drake Tingvellir

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

1 brown Reykjavik harbour and 1 brown catching a Starling at the Botanical Garden

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*

1 probably 2cy 16/3 Reykjavik harbour and 18/3 1 3 cy+ Keflavik

Ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus*

1 near Grindavik

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

3 Reykjavik

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

48 Gardur, 25 Reykjavik harbour and 120 Sandgerdi

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

1 Sandgerdi, *robusta*

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

3 Sandgerdi

Blackheaded Gull *Larus ridibundus*

800 Gardur, 600 Reykjavik, 300 Grindavik, 20 Hafnir, 200 Sandgerdi and 200 Keflavik

Common Gull *Larus canus*

1 Reykjavik

Lesser Blackbacked Gull *Larus fuscus*

2 Gardur 15/3

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

200 Gardur, 20 Vogar, 300 Reykjavik, 20 Hfnir, 100 Sandgerdi and 50 Keflavik of which several seemed to be hybrid Herring x Glaucous Gull

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*

300 Gardur, 1.600 Reykjavik harbour, 20 Hafnafjörður, 300 Grindavik, 300 Sandgerdi and 30 Keflavik. 18/3 4.000 unidentified large white gull far at sea Gardur – probably mostly Iceland Gull.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

80 Gardur, 30 Reykjavik harbour, 20 Grindavik, 2 Hafnir, 20 Sandgerdi and 50 Keflavik

Greater Blackbacked Gull *Larus marinus*

200 Gardur, 200 Reykjavik, 50 Grindavik, 30 hafnir, 40 Sandgerdi and 50 Keflavik

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

1 Reykjavik, 50 Grindavik, 2 Gardur and 20 Keflavik

Auk *Alca torda*
2 Sandgerdi

Black Guillemot *Cephus rgyllle*
12 Reykjavik and 1 Hafnir

Little Auk *Alle alle*
2 Gardur

Feral Dove *Columba livia*
In Reykjavik 40 Lake Tjörnin and 2 Botanical Garden

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
1 Reykjavik in a garden near Botanical Garden

Redwinged Thrush *Turdus iliacus*
1 Lake Tjörnin and 1 Botanical Garden

Raven *Corvus corax*
7 Hafnafjörður, 2 Tingvellir, 41 Reykjavik, 1 Grindavik, 2 Hafnir, 2 Ellidavatn and 2 Keflavik

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
3 Hafnafjörður, 450 Reykjavik, 2 Grindavik, 10 Ellidavatn, 20 Sandgerdi, 2 Gardur and 40 Keflavik

Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*
1 Ullfjötuvatn, 1 Perlan and 2 Botanical Garden

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*
1 Reykjavik harbour, 1 Blue Lagoon, 1 Hafnir, 12 Ellidavatn and 120 Gardur

Mammals

Rabbit
1 tame black and white at Perlan