

Red-Necked Phalarope, Phalaropus lobatus

The Birding Trail of Northwest Iceland

This pamphlet describes a birding trail through Northwest Iceland. The trail starts at the west of the area, in Borðeyri, and travels east through the Northwest, guiding bird lovers through areas rich in birdlife and nature. Though the trail starts at one point and ends at another, travellers can join and leave the trail whereever they want. It has also been set up so that travellers can skip the most remote areas and still keep on the trail, ideal for those with little time but still wanting to see rich birdlife.

What to Expect in Iceland?

360 bird species have been recorded in Iceland and about 85 species nest here. The geographical location of Iceland, far north in the Atlantic, allows bird enthusiasts to see birds from both sides of the Atlantic. These include birds common in northern regions of Europe as well as American birds such as the Great Northern Diver, or accidental visitors such as American Robins, Indigo Buntings, Grey Plover and others. Some of the species nesting in Iceland appear in very large numbers, such as the Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Atlantic Puffin, Fulmars and other sea and cliff birds. For further information on birds that have been spotted in Iceland, we recommend The Icelandic Bird Guide.

The Best Time to Visit

For those who are keen to see as many bird species as possible in Iceland, late May to June is the best time. By then the migrant species have arrived and are preparing their nests. With 24 hours of daylight, Iceland is teeming with bird activities which allows you to bird watch whenever you desire.

As most of the birds in Iceland are migrants they typically leave the island in August and September. The winter season lacks the same abundance of species as summer but still provides the Gyr Falcon, Merlin, White-tailed Eagle, Snowy Owl and Short-eared Owl, Rock Ptarmigan in shining white, Common Raven, Snow Bunting Redpoll, gulls, ducks and a few others.

For best time to see certain species, we recommend www.eBird.org, go to Explore Data - Bar Chart - Iceland.

Birding in the Northwest

The Northwest region of Iceland offers extended wetlands with an abundance of Whooper Swan, Great Northern Diver, ducks such as Long-tailed Duck, waders, and geese. The area has accessible wetlands that offer the ideal habitat for many species of marshland birds and waders. Eider ducks in large colonies, Arctic Tern, Atlantic Puffin, Kittiwake and many other species live close to the ocean. Almost everywhere it should be easy to see and listen to birds such as the Red-necked Phalarope, Golden Plover or Snipe. Of all the bird species that visit Iceland, only a few can not be seen in the Northwest during nesting or migration periods. This map highlights birding locations and areas which are accessible for most bird enthusiasts travelling on their own. For more remote places we recommend tour operators operating both locally and across Iceland. Please notice that a map for the Birding Trail of Northeast Iceland, from Akureyri to Langanes peninsula, is also available. For more information visit www.birdingtrail.is

Protection of Wildlife

Almost all birds in Iceland are floor breeders. Therefore, we recommend care be taken to avoid disturbing their nests and eggs when hiking in nature. We recommend two websites with good information on the protection of birdlife in Iceland.

www.fuglavernd.is/english and www.thewildnorth.org

Information

For further information on North West Iceland go to: www.visithunathing.is

www.northiceland.is www.visitskagafjordur.is

Information centers in the area: The Icelandic Seal Center, Hvammstangi - Tel: 451 2345 Glaðheimar, Blönduós - Tel: 452 4520 Varmahlíð, Skagafirði - Tel: 455 6161 Tourist Information Center, Blönduós - Tel: 452 4848 Puffin and Friends, Sauðárkrókur - Tel: 892 7707

Birding Locations in Northwest Iceland

The map shows locations from Hrútafjörður in the west to cape Pórðarhöfði in the east. The following text describes the locations and areas along the trail with reference to the map.

l. Borðeyri

To get to Borðeyri turn off road #1 on to road #68 and travel north

This area receives the highest concentration of birds during migration in late April and early May when waders like Red Knots, Turnstones and Dunlins arrive at the seashore to feed before leaving for breeding grounds in Greenland and Canada. In June the bay fills up with Eider Ducks, Whooper Swans and some gulls.

2. Reykir / Reykjatangi

Reykir is located close to road #1. To get here, drive from the main road towards the large white building to the left by the sea housing the District museum (Byggðasafnið) Waders gather along the coast feeding or roosting. Here you will also

find Eider Ducks resting on the shoreline and a large Arctic Tern colony. An information sign about the birdlife is located by the museum. The museum displays interesting items from culture in the area. Amongst them being the shark ship Ófeigur.

3. Hvammstangi

From Reykir you continue east on road #1, turn off at road #72 (look out for the Seal Center sign) and travel 6km to Hvammstangi. At the shore to the west of the Icelandic Seal Center, by the harbour, waders such as Turnstones, Purple Sandpipers and Dunlins can be seen early in the summer. All summer Eider ducks are present in the harbour, often with their chicks. Great Cormorant can be seen occasionally and, during winter, the White Tailed Eagle has been spotted flying over the

From Hvammstangi you can either drive directly through town to the Vatnsnes peninsula to go to Illugastaðir (4) or go back onto road #1 and continue east to Gauksmýri (5).



Golden Plover, Pluvialis apricaria

4. Illugastaðir

Drive through the town of Hvammstangi onto the Vatnsnes peninsula. Please note that the road on Vatnsnes is gravel and can get bumpy. Vatnsnes is known for its seal colonies, which are some of the biggest and most accessible in Europe.

The farm Illugastaðir is located on Vatnsnes, 27km north of Hvammstangi. Conditions to look at seals and birds are very good in this area. One kilometer path suitable for disability access leads to the beach, where waders such as Dunlin, Red Knot and Turnstones use the area to feed and roost while migrating to and from their breeding grounds in Greenland and Canada. Please note that the hiking trail to the beach at Illugastaðir goes through a dense Eider duck nesting colony and the area is therefore closed during nesting season from April 30th to June 20th. At Illugastaðir there is a large Arctic Tern colony, Black Guillemot nest close by and and Great Cormorant use the nearby cliffs to rest. During low tide a lot of waders gather at the Illugastaðir beach to feed. At the end of the trail at Illugastaðir you will find a hut containing binoculars for seal and bird watching.

5. Gauksmýri Pond

The pond is located just south of road #1 near the Gauksmýri farm. It was drained in 1960 but has since been restored. Subsequently, various species of birds have returned to the pond. Nearly 35 species of birds have been seen here and in the vicinity, such as Red-throated Diver, Red-necked Phalarope, Whooper Swans, Arctic Tern, Black Headed Gull, Horned Grebe, Black-tailed Godwit, several duck species and waders. This location has disability access and a hut with information material and binoculars.

6. Flóðið in Vatnsdalur Valley

Continuing east on road #1 turn off on road #722 either before or after crossing the bridge over Vatnsdalsá. Flóðið is a large lake at the mouth of the valley Vatnsdalur (short drive after turning off road #1). The area is very popular with Whooper Swans, geese, ducks and waders and a great variety of species nest here. Barnacle Goose stage at the lake while migrating to Greenland each spring and in July the area is popular for moulting birds.

Birds that have been spotted at Flóðið include waders and the birds named above as well as Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Teal, Tufted Duck, Scaup and Red-breasted Merganser.

Slavonian Grebe - Podiceps auritus





Atlantic Puffin, Fratercula arctica

7. Blanda - Blönduós - Hrútey

Blanda is a glacial river originating in Hofsjökull glacier. It flows to the sea in Húnafjörður and at the estuary is the town of Blönduós (on road #1), 58km east of Hvammstangi. Hrútey is an island in Blanda with dense vegetation. The island provides a good opportunity to see forest birds such as Redpoll, Redwing and Meadow Pipit. White Wagtail also nest in the area. A bridge leads to the island which is a major Greylag Goose nesting colony. The island is closed during nesting season from April 20 to June 20. A birding shelter on the western river bank at Einarsnes provides information on local birds. During the summer Harlequin Duck and Greylag Goose can be seen on the river as well as small flocks of waders at the estuary.

8. Skagaströnd

Turn off from road #1 and driving along road 74 for approximately 20 minutes will bring you to the small town of Skagaströnd. There are two good bird locations, an area behind the campsite and also an area close to the coast called Spákonufellshöfði where there are several walking trails. To reach Spákonufellshöfði, continue straight on entering Skagaströnd, passing the town hall on your left. Upon passing the church, follow the main road as it veers to the right. Follow the road as it goes along the coast. Keep going until it turns sharply to the left, however continue straight and you will pass a small swimming pool on your right, after passing the swimming pool take a right turn and drive for about 200 metres and you will see a large sign on the left with details on the walking paths. If you follow the path you will come to an area where you can see eider and harlequin ducks, Arctic terns, golden plovers, oystercatchers, purple sandpipers, Red-necked phalaropes, ruddy turnstones and rock ptarmigans.

9. Kálfshamarsvík

To get to Kálfshamarsvík turn off road #1 onto road #74 and onwards on #745. Please note that road #745 is gravel and can get bumpy. On the west side of the Skagi peninsula is a small creek (north of Króksbjarg). The rocks around the creek form multiform columnar basalt that reaches into the sea. Ducks can be found on the ponds north of the creek and in the spring Barnacle Goose can also be seen here. Arctic Terns nest in the area and there is an Eider Duck nesting colony nearby. Eider Duck breeding grounds are under complete protection and may not be accessed. Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Sanderling and Red Knot can been seen on the beach, sometimes in great numbers in the spring where they feed and roost. Red-throated Divers nest on one of the ponds and various species of waders nest in the area and nearby.

10. Drangey Island

The high and steep island of Drangey rises 180m in the middle of Skagafjörður. Boat tours to the island are available from Reykjaströnd (to get there take road #748). Though covering only 0.2 km² the island is well vegetated and home to large seabird colonies including Kittiwake, Atlantic Puffin and Northern Fulmar. Drangey is the only location where Common Guillemont, Brunnich's Guillemont and

Razorbill can be sighted in Northwest Iceland. The island is one of the largest Kittiwake colonies in Iceland and 4% of the Brunnich's Guillemont population breeds here. Great Black-backed Gull, Common Raven, Meadow Pipit and Snow Bunting as well as some waders also nest on the island. Drangey is a place that no seabird enthusiast should miss; however, the island is not appropriate for those who have problems walking or are afraid of heights as the path leading to the top of the island is rather steep. Trips for viewing the cliffs without going ashore are also available.

11. The lakes by Sauðárkrókur

The ponds near Sauðárkrókur airport are partly artificial, and home to varied birdlife. There is an information sign about the local birdlife by the road to the airport. Though small, the area is very rich in bird species, including a variety of ducks, waders and other birds. Turning off road #75 you arrive at a shallow lake: Áshildarholtsvatn. Marshes and heath with willow shrubs surround the water. The lake can be approached from several places. Whooper Swans and Horned Grebes can be seen with chicks. At the east end of the lake is a birding hide

A riding trail between Áshildarholtsvatn and Tjarnartjörn enables you to walk along most of the Tjarnartjörn waterside. Tjarnartjörn and Áhildarholtsvatn are among the most species rich lakes in Skagafjörður. Greylag Goose and Eurasian Wigeon can be seen at the small pond all summer, usually with chicks. Arctic Terns also nest around the area as well as some wader species such as Whimbrel Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit.

12. Garðsvatn/Keldudalur

To get to Garðsvatn/Keldudalur turn off road #75 onto road #764, a U-shaped road which ends on road #75 just a few km east from where you drove off it. After driving approx. 11 km on the gravel road you come to Keldudalur. There you can find a bird information sign and rich birdlife. About 10 km further you will find Garðsvatn, a sandy bottom lake in the region of Austari Hérðasvötn. An information sign about birdlife at Garðsvatn has been placed at its northern end, which also has a spectactular view over the lake. The area is one of the most species rich areas in Iceland. Many duck and wader species nest here including, for example, Greylag Goose, Tufted Duck, Common Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Red-breasted Merganser, Horned Grebe and Red-necked Phalarope. It is helpful to have a telescope, though binoculars should be sufficient to view the exciting birdlife in this area. A second information sign is located west of the lake. Note that you can go directly to Garðsvatn and skip Keldudalur by not taking the first turn onto road #764 and taking the second turn instead, and then go back the same way you came from, towards #75, after your visit.

13. Ásholt – Ás – Hjaltadalsá

Travelling along the road beside the river Hjaltadalsá in Hjaltadalur Skagafirði (road #767, off road #76), you can see a variety of bird Waders breed along or by the river and the diversity of species is extremely high. This is an excellent location to see Harlequin Ducks

around Hólar and moorland birds such as Ptarmigan are in abundance here at Hólar.

14. Hólar

Kolkuós is located on the east side of Skagafjörður at the estuary of the Kolbeinstaðará river. Diverse birdlife can be seen in the area all year around, particularly in Elínarhólmi which is a islet just off the coast. There is a Eider nesting colony at Elínarhólmi and Black Guillemot nest in the rocks at the base of the islet. Inside the estuary, where the river is quite wide and has formed islets and gravel ridges, Arctic Tern Harlequin and Eider Duck, and Red-necked Phalarope can be seen. In the spring Turnstone, Dunlin and Ringed Plover frequent the beach while Barnacle Goose, Greylag Goose, Long-tailed Ducks, Whooper Swans and Arctic Terns stay at the river banks.

Hólar is located in Hjaltadalur valley (take road #767 or #769, off road

Goldeneye and Tufted Duck, as well as passerines and woodland birds

#76). This is an interesting site for bird watchers as it provides the

opportunity to see ducks at the old fishery pond, such as Barrow's

College provide information about walking trails in the area and

as Wren, Goldcrest and Redpoll can be seen. Many waders breed

further information can be obtained from the Tourism Services here. Passerines not usually found in other places in our Birding Trail such

16. Höfðavatn - Þórðarhöfði

15. Kolkuós – Elínarhólmi

From a distance Þórðarhöfði cape looks like an island but it is, in fact, connected to the mainland via two gravel ridges. Between these ridges is a brackish lake which is also the largest lake in Skagafjörður, approximately 10 km² in size. Höfðavatn is home to diverse birdlife, mostly ducks. In late July, when ducks start to moult, they gather on Höfðavant in large groups all over the lake. The birdlife at Þórðarhöfði cape consists of landbirds and waders. By the Lómatjörn pond, east of lake Höfðavatn, Black-headed Gull breed as well as some species of ducks, Arctic Tern and Horned Grebe. A telescope is recommended for bird watching at Lómatjörn.

Driving road 76 towards Siglufjördur you cross the river Fljótaá, about 800 meters further east turn right at a T junction onto road 82, drive for about 1 km on a gravel road until you see a sign saying Fljótaá beat 4. This track will take you to the river itself. This area is rich in waterfowl and waders such as Eurasian Widgeons, Eurasian Teal, Mallard, Red-breasted Mergansers, Tufted Ducks, Greylag Geese, Black-tailed Godwits, Red-necked Phalaropes, Redshanks and Common Snipes to name a few of the breeding species. Further inland on the river are breeding Harlequin Ducks and colonies of Arctic Terns and Black-headed and Common Gulls. Goosanders overwinter on the river and can be seen until early spring



Black Guillemot, Cepphus grylle

The North West Birding Trail, 2nd edition, 2018. Text: Ellen Magnúsdóttir, Leah Burns, Gudrun Klaus, James Kennedy and Þorlákur

Photos: James Kennedy and Tormod Amundsen

Map: Landmælingar Íslands Design: Árnasynir Print: Nýprent

Published by: North West Toursim Association in cooperation with: Tourism Association of Vestur Húnavatnssýsla, Tourism Association of Austur Húnavatnssýsla, Tourism Association of Skagafjörður, Hólar University and The Icelandic Seal Center. Project management: The Icelandic Seal Center

Thanks to The North East Birding Trail for their support.



The Northwest Birding Trail project is supported by:

VAXTARSAMNINGUR

The North West Birding Trail

Vorthwest Iceland

The trail guides you through some of the richest birding areas in the North West of Iceland. It highlights birding locations and areas which are accessible for most bird enthusiasts travelling on their own. The North West region offers amongst many other things:

Birding trail

Northwest Iceland

- Extended wetlands with an abundance of Whooper Swan, Great Northern Diver, ducks such as Long-tailed Duck, waders and geese.
- Eider ducks in large colonies.
- Accessible wetlands that offer the ideal habitat
- for many species of marshland birds and waders. One of the largest Kittiwake colonies in Iceland on Drangey island.
- For further information: www.birdingiceland.is

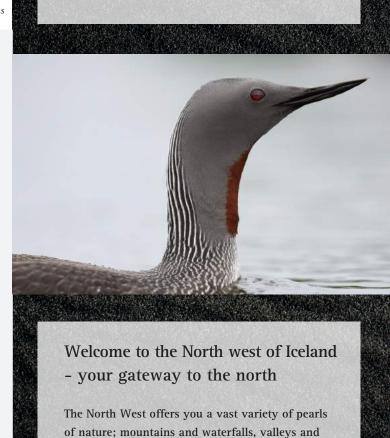


Harlequin Duck, Histrinocius histrinocia

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fjords, moors and lakes. It is an area ideal for

nature watching in many forms, amongst them

being bird, seal and whale watching as well as

experiencing landscape unlike any other.

We invite you to explore everything the area has to offer for nature lovers.

^{*} based on observations made by ornothologist Ellen Magnúsdóttir, May-July 2014, May 2016, 2017 and by James Kennedy and Þorlákur Sigurbjörnsson in May-June 2018