

## PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

### SPITSBERGEN, GREENLAND AND ICELAND

22<sup>nd</sup> July – 4 August 2010

#### TOUR REPORT

**LEADER: Chris Doughty**

Our tour to Spitsbergen, Greenland and Iceland, really was an expedition to one of the few untouched wilderness areas left in the world today. It was a journey to the true 'High Arctic', an extreme land gripped by ice for over eight months of the year and by darkness for over four. During the brief arctic summer these far away lands are transformed into areas of perpetual daylight, where the tundra responds with a rich array of wildflowers, Reindeers graze unconcerned and myriads of cliff-nesting seabirds race to raise their young, before the long Arctic winter sets in again. We cruised along the edge of the pack-ice, marveled at Greenland's metres thick ice cap, sailed past scores of icebergs and sparkling ice floes, as we experienced the long Arctic days of perpetual sunlight. The birding was of great interest and just some of the many highlights included Red-throated and Great Northern Loons, Manx Shearwater, Leach's Storm-petrel, Pink-footed, Greylag and Barnacle Geese, Long-tailed and Harlequin Ducks, Purple Sandpiper, Red Phalarope, Great, Pomarine, Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, Ross', Sabine's, Iceland and Ivory Gulls, Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Black, Common and Brunnich's Guillemots and Snow Bunting. The mammals were just as interesting; and included Arctic Fox, Polar Bear, Walrus, Harp, Ringed, Bearded and Hooded Seals, White-beaked and Atlantic White-sided Dolphins, the critically endangered Bowhead Whale and the equally endangered Narwhal, plus Fin, Northern Minke and Humpback Whales, Musk Ox and Arctic Hare.

Longyearbyen is the main settlement on Spitsbergen and after a long series of flights from Australia, spread over two days, we were very pleased to arrive around midday, one day prior to the cruise. In the afternoon we took the opportunity to do some birding along the edge of the bay. One of the first birds we saw was the delightful Snow Bunting, we found both males and females and young birds, some of which, were still being fed by their parents. Along the melt water streams and tidal pools we found good numbers of Purple Sandpipers and Dunlins, plus one Ruddy Turnstone, in immaculate, full breeding plumage. In the harbour we found large flocks of Common Eider, good numbers of Glaucous Gulls and lots of nesting Arctic Terns, which were more than happy to dive-bomb us, if we got too close to their nests. We also found a few Arctic Skuas, several Black-legged Kittiwakes and a few Black Guillemots, in very trendy breeding plumage. On our way back to the hotel we came across a very tame Reindeer and while having dinner that night in the particularly fine restaurant of our hotel, we observed an Arctic Fox through the window of the dinning room.

After breakfast the following morning, we returned to the edge of the bay and proceeded to walk a little further than we had the previous day. In one of the tidal pools we found a female Long-tailed Duck, continuing our walk we came across several large flocks of Barnacle Geese, which we greatly admired. Suddenly, a pair of Goosanders flew directly over our heads, this is a very rare visitor to Spitzbergen, so we were very pleased to see them. We then found a solitary Common Ringed Plover, which was particularly tame, allowing us to have a good long look at it. As we were walking back towards our hotel, a couple of dark morph Northern Fulmars, this is the colour morph that occurs in the far north, flew right past us, along the edge of the bay. At the Husky breeding station we were delighted to enjoy very close looks at a pair of Ivory Gulls, which were scavenging in the area, we even saw them eating scraps from the dogs feeding bowls. The Ivory Gull was later voted 'bird of the tour', by tour participants. By mid afternoon, it was time to board the 'Akademik Ioffe', which would be home for the next 13 days. Later in the afternoon some group members saw a couple of pairs of Brunnich's Guillemots, sitting on the sea, right next to the boat.

We awoke the following morning to find small flocks of Little Auks flying over the sea and heading inland to their breeding colonies. Small numbers of Atlantic Puffins were also flying past the boat at regular intervals. As the boat neared Alkhornet, where we were to make a landing, a solitary Great Skua flew directly in front of the boat. Suddenly, a large species of seal rose to the surface of the ocean, slightly ahead of the boat. It was a Hooded Seal, which we were very pleased to find. This is not an inshore species; it prefers to stay far out at sea, so it is very rarely observed. We were able to see it very well, which was just as well, as it was our only sighting of the tour. We enjoyed walking on the tundra that morning, and in particular, we were enthralled by the antics of three Arctic Fox cubs, they enjoyed getting involved in play fights and chasing one another around, on the freshly fallen snow, and we in turn, enjoyed watching them. There were also good numbers of Reindeer here, they are a very docile animal and we were able to get very close to them. In the afternoon we made a landing at Poolepynton, on Prins Karls Forland, as this is a favourite place for the now very uncommon Walrus. We were not to be disappointed; four of these huge animals had hauled themselves out onto the beach and were lying all over one another. We were able to approach them to within 10 metres or so, and we were allowed to have a really good look at them. Just a few metres inland from the Walrus there was a small wetland and here we found a female Red Phalarope in immaculate, full breeding plumage. It was hard to decide which to look at first, the Walrus', who quite frankly were not doing much, or the beautiful Red Phalarope, which was swimming around in the shallow lake and her head was bobbing up and down in a sewing machine like action, constantly pecking at the surface of the water. This is typical phalarope feeding behaviour and is a joy to watch. The three members of the phalarope family all employ sexual role reversal; the females have the brighter coloured plumage, the males have a more somber plumage. Although the females lay the eggs, it is the male that incubates them and then takes care of the young afterwards.

The following morning we went for a cruise in the zodiacs, to a rocky headland known as Fuglesongen. The main reason for visiting Fuglesongen was to visit the breeding colony of literally thousands of Little Auks. Thousands of these tennis ball-sized auks were

wheeling around the cliffs, like mosquitoes over a pond. Unlike their larger relatives, the guillemots; Little Auks do not nest on cliff ledges, they are actually cavity nesters, and nest in small crevices in between the rocks. It was tremendous, to be able to watch them sitting at the entrance to their nest holes, just 30 or 40 metres away from us. Later in the morning we made a landing at Tyre Norskoya, the highlight here was watching small flocks of Barnacle Geese, which had goslings with them, at various stages of maturity. In the afternoon we cruised around in zodiacs in a small bay called Holmiabukta, where there were lots of sparkling ice-floes and one or two small icebergs. A carcass of one of the larger species of whales had been washed up in the bay, 18 months previously. Recently, the carcass had sunk below the surface and was resting on the floor of the bay, just a few metres below the surface of the icy water. The seawater was acting as a deep freeze and preserving the whale, ensuring a fresh supply of life preserving whale meat, for the resident population of Polar Bears, which was to be our main quarry here. Fortunately, we were elated to find a total of six Polar Bears, in this area and we were able to watch them for a considerable length of time. There were two females each with a cub, as well as two adolescents, from the previous breeding season, probably about four years earlier. A female would walk along the edge of the bay, with a pup following behind. The mother would sniff the air occasionally in an attempt to locate the whale. On reaching the precise spot, she then dived into the water, swam around for a time, enjoyed a quick bath and then dived below the surface, reappearing at the surface with a large chunk of whale meat in her mouth. While enjoying our fill of Polar Bear sightings, we also saw a couple of Common Guillemots in the bay. We also saw both light and dark morph Northern Fulmars flying around the bay and a solitary dark morph Arctic Skua. Dark morphs account for less than 10% of all Arctic Skuas.

The following morning, after breakfast, we went zodiac cruising at a place called Hamiltonbukta. While seated in the zodiac, we watched a 'blue morph' Arctic Fox walk along a glacier, the animal actually has brown fur in summer, but is known as a blue morph. The glaciers in the bay had produced many icebergs and we were able to sail around them and enjoy a really good look at them. There were lots of smaller ice-floes and on one of them, there was a Bearded Seal. It allowed us to get fairly close and through our binoculars we could clearly see the long whiskers on the upper lip of the animal. In the afternoon, we headed out into the open sea for a two day crossing of the Greenland Sea, sailing southwest; we headed towards the east coast of Greenland. Later in the afternoon, we saw a second Bearded Seal, swimming close to the boat.

The following morning we made a landing at Alesund, a small settlement which serves as a base station for international Arctic research, which has a population of approximately 80 scientists and support staff. They even had a shop, where some of us went shopping. We then traveled out to the Greenland Sea, which is a particularly good area to look for whales and dolphins. So we spent many hours on the bridge, looking for the telltale blows, of whales. This proved very rewarding, as we enjoyed great looks at a Northern Minke Whale, a rather small species of baleen whale. We also had a Fin Whale, the world's second largest species of whale, which surfaced right next to the boat, it was a very impressive sight and we could clearly see the uniform grey upperparts of the great beast. To our surprise, a solitary Bowhead Whale then surfaced fairly close to the boat;

this is one of the world's most endangered large whales, having been hunted to the point of extinction in many parts of its range. It stayed on the surface for quite some time, and we could clearly see that it was all black and had no dorsal fin at all. Later in the afternoon, a small pod of dolphins joined the boat and we could clearly make out the white beak and the black upperparts and dorsal fin and the grey patch between the dorsal fin and the tail. We were watching a pod of White-beaked Dolphins, a species that is confined to the North Atlantic Ocean.

Another full day at sea, which meant more time on the bridge, scanning for wildlife ahead of the boat. The only new species for the day was an immature Ross' Gull, which came very close to the port side of the boat, and we were able to watch it for quite some time.

All of today was spent at sea, although we were close to the coast of Greenland, during the latter half of the afternoon. The sea was remarkably calm, in fact, it was glassy calm, and it was as though we were sailing through a sea of glass. Unfortunately, it was also very foggy; we sailed through huge banks of fog for most of the day, with visibility down to just a few metres, however, there was the odd break in the fog, but a little later, the fog would roll in again. Suddenly, a shape materialised out of the fog, it was an adult Sabine's Gull, in full breeding plumage, but in no time at all, it had disappeared into another fog bank. During one of the few prolonged breaks in the fog, a Humpback Whale put in a brief appearance. On another occasion a Harp Seal surfaced in front of the boat and we had a fairly good look at it, before it too disappeared, under the waves.

In the morning we sailed southwards along the Greenland coast, there was plenty of bird activity; but the only bird that was new for us, was a superb Long-tailed Skua, that flew right past us. In the afternoon we went ashore at Ittoqqortoormiit, the most northerly Inuit community on the east coast of Greenland. We enjoyed our walk around town, where we also added a few new birds, to our ever growing list. At the town rubbish dump there were plenty of Glaucous Gulls, and a quick look through them, produced an adult Black-headed Gull, in full breeding plumage. This was a surprise find, as this species only breeds in the far south of Greenland, and does not normally venture this far to the north. A few Common Ravens were found to be frequenting the rubbish dump, and this was also a new bird for the tour. Along the coast we found a female Northern Wheatear, which was one of the few species of passerines, which we saw on the tour. After dinner we made a landing at Hurry Inlet, where we found a solitary Sanderling, in full breeding plumage, and a walk on the tundra produced a fine flock of Pink-footed Geese.

Today we began our two day exploration of Scoresbysund, the largest fjord in the world. This remarkable place is the birthplace of many giant icebergs that calve from the massive glaciers that wind their way down to the fjord. In some areas the fjord was packed with icebergs, and we had to sail very slowly, in order to maneuver between them. We decided to go for a cruise in the zodiacs, so that we could get up close and personal to the many giant icebergs. This was very enjoyable and a great many photographs were taken. During the zodiac cruise an adult Red-throated Loon, in full breeding plumage, flew directly in front of our zodiac. Later in the day an adult Red-

breasted Merganser flew right past our zodiac and out of sight. Following lunch, we spent much of our time on the bridge as we slowly steered our way through `iceberg alley`, the fjord was literally choked with icebergs! This is when we saw our first Great black-backed Gull of the cruise, and this was followed shortly afterwards by three Harlequin Ducks, a drake and two females. We were very pleased to see the Harlequin Ducks, but the best was still to come. A short time later, we saw a beautiful Ringed Seal, which had hauled itself out onto a small ice-floe. Very late in the afternoon, when only Eric and Michael were on the bridge, they enjoyed watching two female Narwhals, making their way through the ice-floes.

The following morning we continued our journey through Scoresbysund, passing many large icebergs as we did so. From the boat, we were able to scope a superb Musk Ox and one or two Arctic Hares. In Scoresbysund there is a large island made up of reddish soil, and is aptly named Rode Island. In the afternoon we made a landing there and went for a walk on the island. There was a magnificent pair of Peregrine Falcons nesting on the highest bluff on the island, and when we got too close to the bluff, the birds would take off and fly above us calling loudly, it was an exhilarating experience.

All of our time today was spent at sea, as we crossed the Denmark Strait heading towards the west coast of Iceland. Once again, we sailed through patches of sea fog, but during the afternoon there were some prolonged periods, which were free from fog. New birds today included large numbers of Northern Gannets, a superb adult Pomarine Skua and a select few were lucky enough to see a pod of Atlantic White-sided Dolphins. In the afternoon we came across a good number of whales, which included another Fin Whale, and no less than six Humpback Whales. The Humpback Whales put on a tremendous display for us, some of them breaching right out of the water, it was a wonderful experience, and almost everyone on the boat was on the bridge, watching the whales. During the night the seas became rather rough, which continued the following day.

The rough seas today, were not to everyone liking and Eric went a little green, for a large portion of the day, while still others, stayed in their cabin all day! Just as the light was fading, we entered the main harbour of the Westerman Islands, where the cliffs surrounding the harbour were full of nesting Northern Gannets and Northern Fulmars. A couple of Razorbills, flew past our boat and in the harbour itself, there was a large raft of Manx Shearwaters.

Today we enjoyed a beautiful day in the Westerman Islands, off the southwest coast of Iceland. The sun was shining brightly and the birdlife was plentiful. We were taken by bus from the harbour, to a cliff top nesting site of the beautiful Atlantic Puffin, it was really terrific, and was much enjoyed by everyone on the boat. Some of us decided to walk the few kilometres back to the boat, so that we could do some birding on the way. New birds came thick and fast, and they included good numbers of Eurasian Oystercatchers, small flocks of European Golden-Plover, lots of displaying Common Redshanks, several Whimbrels and we very much enjoyed watching numerous Common Snipe performing their ariel display flights. We also found three new species of gulls here, Common, Herring and Lesser Black-backed. We also added Feral Pigeon, Meadow

Pipit and White Wagtail. However, our best find was a Great Northern Loon, just offshore, in a small bay; unfortunately, it had already moulted into non-breeding plumage. Back at the harbour, we added a couple of pairs of Iceland Gulls and several Great Cormorants. In the late afternoon we set sail for Reykjavik, the capital city of Iceland. Shortly after leaving the Westerman Islands, we saw a solitary Leach's Storm-petrel, which was enjoying the rough seas, which continued during the night.

When we awoke, we had already berthed in the harbour at Reykjavik, and following an early breakfast, we boarded a bus and sped off for the airport. On the way we drove past an area of parkland, where we added Greylag Goose, Mallard, Tufted Duck and European Starling.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

### GAVIIDAE

**Red-throated Loon** *Gavia stellata* A single adult bird flew right by the side of our zodiac, as we were enjoying a zodiac cruise around some icebergs in Scoresbysund, in Greenland.

**Great Northern Loon** *Gavia immer* A single adult was observed very well in a small bay in the Westerman Islands of Iceland. Unfortunately, the bird had already moulted into non-breeding plumage.

### PROCELLARIIDAE

**Northern Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* Seen on almost every day of the tour; dark morph birds predominated in the far north and light morph birds were more common during the second half of the tour, as we traveled further south.

**Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus* A small number were observed at sea off Iceland; large rafts would form at dusk, in the main harbour, in the Westerman Islands.

### HYDROBATIDAE

**Leach's Storm-Petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* A single bird was observed at sea, off the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

### SULIDAE

**Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* Small numbers were observed off the east coast of Greenland, before becoming common in the Denmark Strait between Greenland and Iceland and they were also numerous, off the Icelandic coast.

### PHALACROCORACIDAE

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* A small number were roosting on a rocky stack, in the main harbour of the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

### ANATIDAE

**Pink-footed Goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus* A small flock of approximately 20 or so birds, were observed very well at Hurry Inlet, close to Scoresbysund, in Greenland.

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* A large flock was observed in parkland in Reykjavik, as we drove to the airport.

**Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis* Good numbers were observed on many occasions, often with goslings, during our time in Spitsbergen and Greenland.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* A number were observed in parkland in Reykjavik, as we drove to the airport.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* A small number of Tufted Ducks were also observed in parkland in Reykjavik, as we drove to the airport.

**Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* Large numbers present in Spitsbergen, Greenland and Iceland.

**Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus* A small flock of three birds was observed in the middle of Scoresbysund, in Greenland.

**Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* We very much enjoyed watching a female at very close quarters, in Longyearbyen Harbour, in Spitsbergen. We then saw a few more females on a small pond at Alesund, also in Spitsbergen.

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* An adult in breeding plumage flew past our zodiac as we were about to make a landing in Scoresbysund, Greenland.

**Goosander** *Mergus merganser* A pair of Goosanders flew directly over our heads in Longyearbyen Harbour, in Spitsbergen. There are only half a dozen or so sightings of this species in Spitsbergen, so we were very fortunate to see them.

#### FALCONIDAE

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* We very much enjoyed watching a pair at very close quarters, which were nesting on the highest bluff on Rode Island, in Scoresbysund, Greenland.

#### HAEMATOPODIDAE

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* Good numbers of these birds were particularly tame and confiding, on the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

#### CHARADRIIDAE

**European Golden-Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* Small numbers were seen very well in beautiful breeding plumage, in the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* A single was observed at very close quarters in Longyearbyen Harbour, Spitsbergen, followed by a second sighting of an individual at Alesund, also in Spitsbergen.

#### SCOLOPACIDAE

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* Good numbers were performing their ariel display flights over farmland in the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* Good numbers of this species were also seen in farmland, in the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* We enjoyed watching them on their breeding grounds in farmland in the Westerman Islands of Iceland. For Australians who only see waders on their wintering grounds in Australia, it seemed rather strange to see this species sat on fence posts, singing their heads off!

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* Very small numbers were observed in Spitsbergen, Greenland and Iceland.

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba* A single bird in full breeding plumage was observed in the scope very well, at Hurry Inlet, in Scoresbysund, Greenland.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* Good numbers in full breeding plumage, were present in Longyearbyen Harbour and at Alesund, in Spitsbergen.

**Purple Sandpiper** *Calidris maritima* Large numbers of this species were encountered throughout all wetland areas of Spitsbergen and Greenland.

**Red Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicaria* We enjoyed really close scope views of an adult female, in full breeding plumage at Podepynton, on Prins Karles Forland, in Spitsbergen. This would have to be one of the most beautiful of all waders, when in breeding plumage.

## LARIDAE

- Common Gull** *Larus canus* A large flock was observed sitting in farmland, on the Westerman Islands of Iceland.
- Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* Small numbers observed in Scoresbysund and offshore, in both Greenland and Iceland.
- Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* This was very much the common gull of Spitsbergen and Greenland, but we failed to observe it on the Westerman Islands.
- Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucoides* We were very fortunate to observe two adults and two immatures in the main harbour of the Westerman Islands, in Iceland. This very uncommon species has two breeding populations; one in Canada, which breeds only on Baffin Island and in extreme northwestern Quebec, and a second population, which breeds in the southern half of Greenland, well to the south of Scoresbysund. The Canadian population winters on the Atlantic coast from Labrador to New England, with much smaller numbers wintering on the Great Lakes. The birds of the western Greenland coast winter in the same area, while the birds breeding on the east coast of Greenland are thought to winter mainly on the north coast of Iceland. So we were indeed fortunate to find Iceland Gulls on the south coast of Iceland, so early in the year.
- Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* Small numbers scattered around the coast of the Westerman Islands of Iceland.
- Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* Once again, small numbers were observed on a few occasions in the Westerman Islands of Iceland.
- Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus* We were surprised to find an adult bird in full breeding plumage at the rubbish dump in Ittoqqortoormiit, where this bird should not occur. This is one of the few species of birds that has benefited from man and has been steadily increasing its range since the early 1800s. It began to breed in the far south of Greenland in 1969 and numbers have gradually increased and the bird has begun to spread northwards along the east coast of Greenland, but nowhere near as far as Scoresbysund or Ittoqqortoormiit. We also observed large numbers of this species in parkland in Reykjavik, as we drove to the airport.
- Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnean* We were even more fortunate to enjoy superb looks at an adult pair scavenging at the Husky breeding centre in Longyearbyen, in Spitsbergen. This species is very much a scavenger and we watched them picking at bits of food on wooden palates and picking scraps out of the dogs feeding bowls. Bob got some great photographs of the Ivory Gulls and it was voted 'Bird of the trip', by tour participants. Some tour participants also had a very distant view of a solitary bird in Scoresbysund, in Greenland.
- Ross' Gull** *Rhodostethia rosea* Yet another, very fortunate sighting, we saw an immature bird right next to the boat, in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, between Spitsbergen and Greenland. This species is known to migrate through this area, at that time of year.
- Sabine's Gull** *Exam sabini* More good fortune, enabled us to enjoy good sightings of two separate adult birds, both in breeding plumage, and both where observed off the east coast of Greenland.
- Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* Observed on most days of the cruise, this is a very attractive species of gull.

## STERNIDAE

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* Once again, this species was observed on most days of the cruise, even when we were well out to sea.

## STERCORARIIDAE

**Great Skua** *Stercorarius skua* Regularly encountered in coastal waters of Spitsbergen and Iceland but somewhat surprising, not in coastal waters of Greenland.

**Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus* One bird was observed off the east coast of Greenland, which is not normally an area where this bird occurs with any regularity.

**Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* Regularly encountered in coastal areas of Spitsbergen, Greenland and Iceland. Almost all were pale morph birds.

**Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* One bird observed in flight, offshore from Scoresbysund. At Hurry Inlet, part of Scoresbysund we also observed breeding birds at very close quarters; to be so close to these very beautiful birds, was a real treat.

## ALCIDAE

**Little Auk** *Alle alle* Literally thousands of birds observed at their breeding cliffs and out at sea, during our time in Spitsbergen and Greenland.

**Common Guillemot** *Uria aalge* Small numbers observed off the coast of Spitsbergen and in the North Atlantic between Spitsbergen and Greenland.

**Brunnich's Guillemot** *Uria lomvia* This species replaces the Common Guillemot in Spitsbergen and Greenland, and both species breed in Iceland. We saw literally thousands of birds at their breeding cliffs and out at sea, during our time in Spitsbergen and Greenland.

**Razorbill** *Alca torda* This species of auk is absent from Spitsbergen and Greenland, but breeds in good numbers on the sea cliffs of Iceland, where we saw a few birds.

**Black Guillemot** *Cepphus grylle* When sporting its breeding plumage, this is a very attractive species. We observed huge numbers on their breeding cliffs and at sea, in all the areas we visited.

**Atlantic Puffin** *Fratercula arctica* Observed at sea off Spitsbergen, Greenland and Iceland, but it was not until we were in the Westerman Islands of Iceland, that we really got to see this bird very well. This occurred when we were driven to one of their cliff top nesting colonies, it really is a very fine looking bird.

## COLUMBIADAE

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia* There was a small feral population present on the Westerman Islands,

## MOTACILLIDAE

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* Commonly encountered during our time in the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* Large numbers of this species were also encountered breeding in the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

MUSCICAPIDAE

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* We enjoyed good looks at this attractive species around Ittoqqortoormiit and other areas of Scoresbysund and on the Westerman Islands of Iceland.

CORVIDAE

**Common Raven** *Corvus corax* Small numbers present along the coast of Greenland and the Westerman Island of Iceland.

STURNIDAE

**Common Starling** *Sturnus Vulgaris* Good numbers observed in parkland in Reykjavik, as we drove to the airport.

EMBERIZIDAE

**Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* This very attractive species was readily found along the coasts of Spitsbergen and Greenland.

## MAMMALS

**Arctic Fox** *Alopex lagopus* We saw both the normal grey morph of this species, and the much rarer blue morph. We also enjoyed watching several cubs, play fighting with one another.

**Polar Bear** *Ursus maritimus* Undoubtedly, the mammalian highlight of the tour, to observe adult females with cubs at close quarters, truly was one of those lasting memories, that none of us will ever forget.

**Walrus** *Odobenus rosmarus* We all enjoyed watching Walrus, also at very close quarters, unfortunately, numbers of this species continue to decline.

**Harp Seal** *Phoca groenlandicus* We were fortunate to observe this species at sea, off the coast of Greenland.

**Ringed Seal** *Phoca hispida* We enjoyed a couple of sightings of this uncommon species, while we were in Scoresbysund.

**Bearded Seal** *Erignathus barbatus* Seen well on a number of occasions throughout the tour.

**Hooded Seal** *Cystophora cristata* We were very fortunate to observe this uncommon and seldom seen species of seal, off the coast of Spitsbergen.

**White-beaked Dolphin** *Lagenorhynchus albirostris* A pod was observed very well on one occasion, off the coast of Spitsbergen, an area where this species rarely occurs.

**Atlantic White-sided Dolphin** *Lagenorhynchus acutus* Observed by Eric and Michael off Scoresbysund, once again, in an area where this species does not normally occur.

**Bowhead Whale** *Balaena mysticetus* We were extremely fortunate to observe one of these whales off the coast of Spitsbergen. The Spitsbergen population is almost extinct, due to over hunting. This species spends most of its life along the edge of the Arctic pack-ice.

**Narwhal** *Monodon monoceros* This is another endangered species of whale, its spends the summer months, in deep, cold fjords and bays and is never far from the pack-ice. This is exactly the habitat where Eric and Michael observed two females, while the ship was cruising through Scoresbysund, in Greenland.

**Fin Whale** *Balaenoptera physalus* The second largest mammal ever to frequent this planet; we saw it on two separate occasions and fortunately for us, it rose to the surface on both occasions, and we were able to see it very well indeed.

**Northern Minke Whale** *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* Seen very well on one occasion, off the coast of Spitsbergen.

**Humpback Whale** *Megaptera novaeangliae* Observed well on three days of the tour; on one of the days, we had spotted a pod of them, and almost all the passengers ended up on the bridge, where these playful animals put on a tremendous display for us, sometimes breaching clear out of the ocean.

**Reindeer** *Rangifer tarandus* Small herds were often encountered during our time in Spitsbergen.

**Musk Ox** *Ovibos moschatus* An adult was observed in Scoresbysund and seen well through the telescope, from the boat.

**Arctic Hare** *Lepus arcticus* Only observed in Scoresbysund and mainly while we were

watching the Musk Ox. All where in splendid winter plumage, sporting pure white fur.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> August the part of the tour group that did not stay on in Iceland, enjoyed a full days birding in southern Sweden, with Erik Molgaard, a local birding guide. We visited three areas: the famous migration watch point of Falsterbo, an area of farmland close to Skurup and an area of large lakes, close to Vebereb. Below is a list of the birds and mammals that we saw on this day.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* Vebereb  
**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* Falsterbo  
**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* Falsterbo  
**Great Egret** *Ardea alba* Vebereb  
**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor* Falsterbo  
**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* Falsterbo  
**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis* Falsterbo  
**Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis* Falsterbo  
**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* Falsterbo  
**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* Vebereb  
**Gadwall** *Anas strepera* Vebereb  
**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* Falsterbo  
**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* Falsterbo  
**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* Vebereb  
**Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina* Falsterbo  
**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* Falsterbo  
**Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* Falsterbo  
**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra* Falsterbo  
**Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* Falsterbo  
**Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* Falsterbo  
**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* Vebereb  
**European Honey-buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* Skurup  
**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* Skurup  
**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* Skurup  
**White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* Skurup  
**Western Marsh-Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* Skurup  
**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* Falsterbo  
**Eurasian Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* Skurup  
**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* Skurup  
**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* Falsterbo  
**Common Crane** *Grus grus* Vebereb  
**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* Vebereb  
**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra* Falsterbo  
**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* Falsterbo  
**Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* Falsterbo  
**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* Falsterbo  
**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* Falsterbo  
**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* Falsterbo  
**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* Falsterbo  
**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* Falsterbo  
**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* Falsterbo

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* Falsterbo  
**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus* Vebereb  
**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* Falsterbo  
**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* Falsterbo  
**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* Falsterbo  
**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Falsterbo  
**Sanderling** *Calidris alba* Falsterbo  
**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* Falsterbo  
**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* Falsterbo  
**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* Falsterbo  
**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* Falsterbo  
**Common Gull** *Larus canus* Falsterbo  
**Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* Falsterbo  
**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* Falsterbo  
**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* Falsterbo  
**Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus* Falsterbo  
**Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis* Falsterbo  
**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* Skurup  
**Little Tern** *Sterna albifrons* Falsterbo  
**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* Vebereb  
**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia* Falsterbo  
**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* Vebereb  
**Common Wood-Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* Falsterbo  
**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* Falsterbo  
**Common Swift** *Apus apus* Falsterbo  
**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* Falsterbo  
**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* Falsterbo  
**Common Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* Falsterbo  
**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* Falsterbo  
**Common House Martin** *Delichon urbica* Falsterbo  
**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* Falsterbo  
**European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* Skurup  
**Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula* Falsterbo  
**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* Falsterbo  
**European Reed-Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* Falsterbo  
**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* Falsterbo  
**Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* Falsterbo  
**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* Falsterbo  
**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* Falsterbo  
**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* Falsterbo  
**Willow Tit** *Poecile montana* Vebereb  
**Great Tit** *Parus major* Falsterbo  
**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* Vebereb  
**Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* Skurup  
**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* Skurup  
**Common Magpie** *Pica pica* Falsterbo

**Western Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula* Falsterbo  
**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* Falsterbo  
**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* Falsterbo  
**Common Raven** *Corvus corax* Skurup  
**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* Falsterbo  
**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* Falsterbo  
**European Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris* Falsterbo  
**European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* Falsterbo  
**Common Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina* Falsterbo  
**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella* Skurup  
**Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* Falsterbo

#### MAMMALS

**Grey Seal** *Halichoerus gyrfus*  
**Common Seal** *Phoca vitulina*  
**Western Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus*  
**Fallow Deer** *Dama dama*