

## ICELAND BIRDING



**June 23 – July 2, 2015**  
**With Bill Gette**

Iceland is stunningly beautiful and otherworldly. Everywhere you turn there are glaciers, waterfalls, lava fields, rainbows, and dramatic mountain ranges. Lying in the cold, gray waters of the North Atlantic, Iceland has long fired the imagination of travelers and birdwatchers alike. The ancient Nordic history and sagas come alive in this most sparsely populated country in Europe. With so few people, there is nothing to distract you from the stark volcanic landscape and emerald green vistas. The birdlife is equally dramatic and varied, with such special species as Snow Bunting and Rock Ptarmigan, and the spectacle of thousands of breeding alcids and waterfowl. Iceland's national bird, the Gyrfalcon, is often seen near nesting colonies.

## DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

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**Day 0: Monday, June 22, 2015** – Depart the U.S.A. in the evening for Iceland. *Overnight flight.*

**Day 1: Tuesday, June 23, 2015** – **Travel to the Snæfellsnes Peninsula**

We will arrive at Iceland's Keflavík International Airport located approximately 30 miles southwest of Reykjavik in the early morning. From Keflavík, we will travel north along the west coast to the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. En route, we will pass by Reykjavík, (Iceland's capital), the beautiful Hvalfjörður fjord, and the historic settlement of Borgarnes. We will stop occasionally along the way to bird and take photos of the magnificent scenery. You will quickly learn to spot Iceland's volcanic topography; the drive from the airport takes you through immense lava fields, covered in vibrant moss.



Land birds to be expected include Redwing and White Wagtail. At coastal viewpoints, we should look for Glaucous and Lesser Black-backed gulls and shorebirds. We will arrive on the scenic Snæfellsnes Peninsula, where we'll spend the first two nights in the village of Ólafsvík and one night in Stykkishólmur. Upon arrival at Ólafsvík, we will have a brief introduction before dinner to acquaint us with the many exciting aspects of our Iceland adventure. *Overnight Hótel Ólafsvík* on the western tip of the Snæfellsnes peninsula. (L,D)

**Day 2: Wednesday, June 24, 2015** – **Bird Cliffs of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula**

Often described as Iceland in miniature, the 60 mile-long Snæfellsnes Peninsula provides a wonderful introduction to the country. The peninsula has dramatic sea cliffs, fjords, golden beaches, and haunting volcanic peaks. We will visit huge seabird nesting colonies with Black-legged Kittiwakes, Common Murres (Guillemots), and Thick-billed Murres. Along the shallow ponds and wetlands, we should see Red-throated Loons (Divers), Arctic Terns, Whooper Swans, Black-headed Gulls, and shorebirds. From the ocean overlooks, we will scan for cetaceans, including Humpback Whales. As we round the peninsula, we will have magnificent views of the Snæfellsjökull icecap. We'll explore the area on foot and take a stroll through the lava fields (distance 2 miles) in addition to enjoying the magnificent sea cliffs and breeding sea birds, including Thick-billed Murre, nearby. Surprisingly, lava fields often harbor some of the most beautiful vegetation in the country, giving shelter to approximately 130 species of plants, including many species of ferns. *Overnight Hótel Ólafsvík* on the western tip of the Snæfellsnes peninsula. (B,L,D)

**Day 3: Thursday, June 25, 2015** – **Island of Flatey**

Today, we will cruise to the island of Flatey ("Flat Island" in Icelandic) in Breiðafjörður Bay, north of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. The island, which is primarily a summer community, is slightly over a mile long and about a half mile wide. We will have several hours to explore the island and visit the "old village" with its restored buildings. As we cross Breiðafjörður Bay on the *Ferry Baldur* to the island, we should look for Great Cormorant, European Shag, Northern Fulmar, loons, and several species of gulls. On the island, we should see White Wagtail, Snow Bunting, Red-necked Phalarope, Whimbrel, and other breeding shorebirds (waders). With luck we could find a Red Phalarope.

*Overnight Hotel Stykkishólmur.* (B,L,D)



**Day 4: Friday, June 26, 2015 – Northern Iceland**

We will leave the Snæfellsnes Peninsula today and travel east across northern Iceland to Akureyri on Eyjafjörður Fjord. During our all-day trip, we will stop often for photo opportunities and to bird. The many roadside ponds, wetlands, and barren uplands provide good birding. We will be on the lookout for Graylag Goose, Pink-footed Goose, and breeding shorebirds, including Dunlin. *Overnight Öngulsstaðir Guesthouse, Akureyri.* (B,L,D)



**Day 5: Saturday, June 27, 2015 – Lake Mývatn and Breeding Waterfowl**

Our Iceland itinerary promises many highlights. Certainly one of these will be our visit to Lake Mývatn (“Midge Lake” in Icelandic). Located at the western edge of a volcanic zone that passes across Iceland, Lake Mývatn was created when a lava flow dammed a river about 2,300 years ago. The shallow lake and the Laxá River are now two of the most important breeding places for waterfowl in Europe. We should have great looks of Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Barrow’s Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck, Eurasian Teal, Horned (Slavonian) Grebe, Common Loon (Great Northern Diver), Red-necked Phalarope, and many other wetland species. Along the Laxá River, we will look for Harlequin Duck. With luck, we could see Gyrfalcon, Merlin, and Short-eared Owl, all of which breed in the area. The Lake Mývatn region is also of great interest to botanists. It’s one of the few places in the world where one can see the filamentous green alga, Marimo (Cladophora Ball or Moss Ball in English). *Overnight Öngulsstaðir Guesthouse.* (B,L,D)

**Day 6: Sunday, June 28, 2015 – Island of Hrísey and the Botanical Gardens of Akureyri**

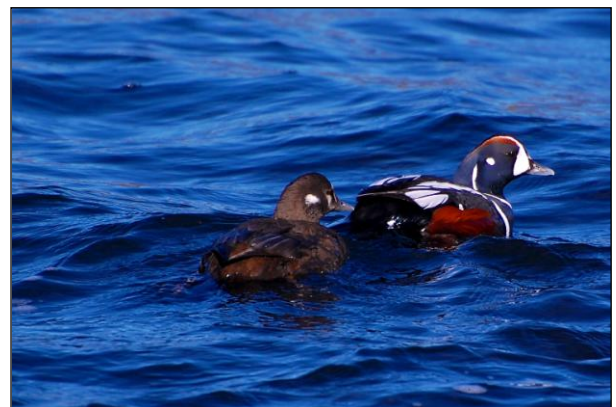
Today, we’ll have another island adventure – we’ll visit Hrísey Island in Eyjafjörður Bay. To reach Hrísey, we’ll take a 15-minute ride ferry from Árskógssandur to the island and then follow walking trails. Here, we should see Black-tailed Godwit, Rock Ptarmigan, Snow Bunting, and Meadow Pipit. During our ferry rides and from coastal overlooks, we will scan for marine mammals, including Harbor Porpoise, Humpback Whale, and Minke Whale. When we return to the mainland, we will have a brief visit to Akureyri and its botanical gardens. The gardens are known not only for the display of native Icelandic flora, but also for land birds, including the Icelandic race of Common Redpoll. *Overnight Öngulsstaðir Guesthouse.* (B,L,D)

**Day 7: Monday, June 29, 2015 – Geysers at Geysir, Waterfall at Gullfoss**

Our adventure continues as we cross Iceland’s rugged interior and make our way south to Skálholt. During our all-day trip, we will make stops for photography and birding and take time to study the plants and geologic formations. One of our key bird species for today will be Gyrfalcon. We will stop at Hveravellir with a chance to soak in the natural hot pool there. Late in the afternoon, we’ll visit the spouting geysers at Geysir and the glacial waterfall at Gullfoss. We’ll spend the next three nights at Skálholt, the ancient seat of the Icelandic bishops. *Overnight Skálholtsskóli.* (B,L,D)

**Day 8: Tuesday, June 30, 2015 – Þingvellir, Historic Parliament**

No visit to Iceland would be complete without a visit to Þingvellir (Thingvellir) National Park. Here, history, geology, ornithology, and botany come together in one of the most popular tourist destinations in Iceland. Þingvellir is the site of the historic Icelandic parliament (Althing or Alþing) that was established in 930 A.D. The park also protects important geological sites where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates come in contact and produce seismic and volcanic activity. The cracks and faults that transverse the region are clearly visible within the park. *Overnight Skálholtsskóli.* (B,L,D)





### Day 9: Wednesday, July 1, 2015 – Westman Islands

We will head to the south coast and take the ferry to the Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar) this morning. The islands, which were created by undersea volcanic activity, are rocky and steep-sided. Heimaey, the largest and only inhabited island, has suffered recent eruptions and we will see evidence of the volcanic activity as we enter the harbor and explore the island. The islands are known for the huge Atlantic Puffin colonies and the other alcid species that nest there. We should be on the lookout for Northern Gannet and Manx Shearwater. Returning to the mainland in the afternoon, we'll see areas affected by the Eyjafjallajökull eruption of 2010. *Overnight Skálholtsskóli.* (B,L,D)

### Day 10: Thursday, July 2, 2015 – Return to Reykjavík

We head for Reykjavík via the geothermal areas of Hveragerði and Hellisheiði before transferring to the airport at Keflavík for our afternoon return flights home. (B)

### ABOUT THIS TRIP:

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**Pace** - this is an active birding and wildlife watching tour that requires fairly lengthy drives on two days as we move between accommodations. Walking (up to 4 miles each day) often involves rough tracks and uneven terrain. Of course, travelers can remain close to the bus during these walks if they prefer.

**Accommodations** will be in simple but comfortable country hotels or guesthouses. All rooms have their own shower and bathrooms. Meals are taken from the hotel's 'dish of the day' with a vegetarian option always available if preferred. Most food is locally sourced and is delicious. We have picnic lunches with hot drinks during the days.

**Transportation** - we use a comfortable minibus appropriate to the group size with plenty of space for backpacks and optical equipment. When traveling between accommodations we may use a luggage trailer for suitcases and large bags.

### ABOUT YOUR GUIDES:

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**Mass Audubon guide, Bill Gette** is the Sanctuary Director at the Mass Audubon Joppa Flats Education Center in Newburyport. For almost 30 years, he has led natural history expeditions for Mass Audubon throughout the United States and to 17 countries, including Iceland, Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Bhutan, Ecuador and the Galapagos, and Costa Rica.

Bill has taken a leadership role in bird research and public education concerning birds and bird conservation. He directs the Joppa Flats Bird Banding Station, a research and education facility operated in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. He and his staff have also developed interpretive programs and field trips for audiences with special needs, including the visually impaired. Bill's most recent initiative is Mass Audubon's Birder's Certificate Program, which is designed to enhance the public's knowledge about birds and to stimulate a conservation ethic.



**Local Guide - Andy Jones** has been running natural history tours in Iceland for 25 years. He began his career in conservation and wildlife in the UK. He was a warden on the seabird island of Skomer, a ranger with the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the RSPB's senior investigations officer and a Wildlife Trust director. He studied geology and is an enthusiastic and extremely knowledgeable leader.

*Photos courtesy of Andy Jones and Iceland Naturalist and Bill Gette*

## TERMS & CONDITIONS

### TOUR PRICE

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**\$4400 based on double occupancy, Single supplement +\$500** A \$500 per person deposit is required along with the reservation form. This cost is based on a minimum of 10 persons.

#### Price Includes:

- All accommodations
- All meals
- Transportation via van during tour
- All permits, activities and entry fees,
- Services of Mass Audubon and local naturalist guide
- All tips and gratuities

#### Does Not Include:

- Items of a personal nature such as beverages from the bar.
- Portage, laundry, phone calls, or gift items.
- International flights to Iceland and airport departure taxes

**APPLICATIONS, RESERVATIONS, DEPOSITS:** Early applications are strongly encouraged. Trip rosters usually must be finalized 4 months before departure! All applications must be accompanied by a completed reservation form and a \$500 deposit. Deposits can be by check or credit card (Visa or MasterCard). In the case of questionable health, we reserve the right to require a physician's certification to affirm you are capable of the activities. Final payment is due 90 (March 20, 2015) days before the departure date. Final payment must be by check or money order.

**RATES:** All tour prices are based on double occupancy. If you would like us to find you a roommate, we will do our best, but cannot guarantee a share. If we cannot find a share, you will need to pay the single supplement. All forms and fares are accurate at the time of publication August 2014 but are subject to change at any time prior to departure. It is our policy to only pass on the actual amount of any increases in airfares or land costs such as those increases due to the devaluation of the dollar. Rarely, a price increase may be called for if the group falls below the minimum, as listed in the itinerary.

**FLIGHTS: You, the traveler, are responsible for booking and paying for your own international flights.** Once you reserve your space, we will provide you with suggested flights and tell you which flights our leaders will take. You may book flights directly with the airline, online, or with a travel agent. Please be aware that most tickets are non-refundable, therefore you should not book your flight arrangements until you have checked with us to be sure the tour has the minimum number of participants for the trip to go. We ask that you provide us with your flight details so we can be sure to meet you at the airport upon your arrival.

**PHOTOS:** Mass Audubon reserves the right to make use of any photograph taken on the tour. We guarantee that no photos of a comprising nature will be used. If you have questions or concerns, please contact us.

**TRIP INSURANCE:** A brochure and application for optional trip cancellation, illness and baggage insurance will be sent to you upon registrations. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance** to protect yourself. No one wants to cancel their trip, but sometimes accidents and illnesses do happen. If you have to cancel, the policy below will be followed. To shop for good trip insurance, we recommend you look here: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com)

**CANCELLATION Policy: If you need to change your booking, you must inform us immediately in writing.** All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the Massachusetts Audubon Travel Office. Cancellations received up to 121 days prior to departure will be refunded deposits less a \$200 per person fee. For cancellations between 120 and 90 days prior to departure, all deposits will not be refunded. There are no refunds for cancellations 90 days or less from departure. We strongly urge all travelers to purchase trip cancellation insurance. You will be sent information from the Massachusetts Audubon Society upon receipt of your deposit

**Your Responsibility:** Although every precaution is taken to safeguard you and your belongings, group travel trips by their nature involve a certain amount of risk. Trip participants should understand that the domestic and international trips sponsored/operated by Massachusetts Audubon Society (Mass Audubon Tours) - hereafter collectively "M.A.S." - involve known and unknown risks.

M.A.S. assumes no responsibility for injuries, death, financial losses or damage to clients' property caused by or occurring during participation in any of the travel trips sponsored/operated by M.A.S. Trip participants must assume responsibility for having sufficient skill and fitness to participate in the trips and activities offered or sponsored by M.A.S. Trip participants must also certify that they have no medical, mental or physical conditions which could interfere with their abilities to participate in the activities and/or trips they are participating in and they must assume and bear the cost of all risks that may be created, directly or indirectly, by any such condition. It is the responsibility of trip participants to have in place adequate insurance to cover any injury, damage or emergency transportation costs related to their travel and/or participation in trip activities and/or to bear the costs of such injury, damage or emergency transportation costs. Because of the risks associated with the travel trips sponsored by M.A.S. we urge all trip participants to supplement their own insurance with travel or vacation or emergency response types of insurance. M.A.S. requires that all trip participants acknowledge and assume these risks by reading and signing an M.A.S. Release and Waiver and Assumption of Risk contract prior to departure.

**CONDITIONS OF TRAVEL:** Travelers will be provided with an itinerary and trip preparation information. It is expected that travelers will read this information prior to trip departure. Travelers will be responsible for completing an application reservation form, including the personal information and a release of liability. Travelers will be expected to abide by the terms set for in the invoice. During the tour, travelers are asked to respect and follow the directions of their guide and leader.

**Note:** This trip will involve some long drives on sometimes rough and winding roads. If you are difficulties with motion sickness, you might find it uncomfortable.



## Reservation form

**Passenger 1 Name as shown on passport:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nickname** for Name tag: \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Passenger 2 Name as shown on passport:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nickname** for Name tag: \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Day: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Room Preferences:**

\_\_\_ I request single accommodations where available and will pay the single supplement.

\_\_\_ I would like to be assigned a roommate. If one is not available, I will pay the single supplement.

### **Personal Information:**

\_\_\_ I/We are non-smokers. (If you are a smoker(s), please check here \_\_\_ and note that smoking is limited to outdoors in non-group spaces)

\_\_\_ Is there anything Mass Audubon should know about your health that might impact your ability to participate comfortably on this trips? Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

**Deposit:** Please find my enclosed deposit of (\$500 per person) **check** \_\_\_\_\_ or please **charge** \_\_\_\_\_ my credit card:

VISA MC Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Checks should be made payable to “*Massachusetts Audubon Society*”