

ICELAND

Birding, Geology, and Natural History Exploration

June 14–22, 2019

with David Moon



Gyrfalcon by Daniel Bergmann

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 emerald green vistas, glaciers, waterfalls, lava fields, rainbows, and dramatic mountain ranges. 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.

What To Expect

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

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. Fish courses are common. Picnic lunches are often planned and prepared ahead of time so last minute changes (from vegetarian to non-vegetarian) cannot be accommodated. Travelers with serious food allergies may not be able to be accommodated. Please call if you have questions. Most food is locally sourced and we will frequently have picnic lunches in the field with hot drinks.

Transportation

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.



Redshanks by Bill Gette

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Day 1: June 14, 2019 – Arrival and Snæfellsnes Peninsula

Arrive at Iceland's Keflavík International Airport located approximately 30 miles southwest of Reykjavik in the early morning. We will stop in Keflavik for breakfast, then begin our travels! En route, we will pass by Reykjavik (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. 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.

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. We will travel towards the scenic Snæfellsnes Peninsula, where we'll spend 2 nights.

Overnight at *Kast Guesthouse* www.kastguesthouse.is/EN (B, L, D)



Rainbow over waterfall by Karen O'Neill

Day 2: June 15, 2019 – Snæfellsnes Peninsula

Often described as Iceland in miniature, the 60 mile-long Snæfellsnes 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.

We will fully explore the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. From the ocean overlooks we will scan for cetaceans, including Humpback Whales. As we round the peninsula, if clouds part, we will have magnificent views of the Snæfellsjökull icecap. If time allows we will take walks 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 at Kast Guesthouse www.kastguesthouse.is/EN (B, L, D)

Day 3: June 16, 2019 - Travel north to Akureyri

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 and Pink-footed geese and breeding shorebirds, including Dunlin.

Late in the afternoon, we will arrive in Iceland's second largest city, (with a population of ~ 18,000!) Akureyri, an important port and fishing center.

Overnight Lamb Inn Öngulsstaðir, Akureyri. (B, L, D)

Day 4: June 17, 2019 - Lake Mývatn and Breeding Waterfowl



Red-necked Phalarope by Bill Gette

For birders, a day at Lake Mývatn (“Midge Lake” in Icelandic) is always a highlight. 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.

Overnight Lamb Inn Öngulsstaðir, Akureyri. (B, L, D)



Rock Ptarmigan by Bill Gette

Day 5: June 18, 2019 – Island of Hrísey and the Botanical Gardens of Akureyri

Today we'll have 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 Lamb Inn Öngulsstadir, Akureyri. (B, L, D)

Day 6: June 19, 2019

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 at Skálholt <http://skalholt.is/> (B, L, D)

Day 7: June 20 2018 - Þingvellir (Thingvellir) National Park.

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 traverse the region are clearly visible within the park.

Overnight at Skálholt <http://skalholt.is/> (B, L, D)

Day 8: June 21, 2019 – Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar)

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 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 at Skálholt <http://skalholt.is/> (B, L, D)

Day 9: June 22, 2019 – Return to Reykjavík



Black-tailed Godwit by Bill Gette

We say farewell to this lovely landscape this morning as we head to Iceland's Keflavík International Airport. We will not neglect some birding sites along the way, but plan to be in Reykjavík noon time to allow everyone to have the option to shop, explore the city, and have a hearty lunch before heading to the airport. (B, L)

About Your Mass Audubon Guide



David Moon is the Sanctuary Director of Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center in Newburyport. He has been teaching college courses in Costa Rica for 25 years after living in Monteverde, where he directed academic programs for the Monteverde Institute. Along with his administrative duties at Joppa Flats, David leads birding trips to Plum Island, the coast of New England, and sites across North America. David's long experience in both classroom and non-formal education stems from his passion for bringing people into close contact with nature.

About Your Local Guide



Trausti Gunnarsson is an English-speaking professional Icelandic wildlife guide with a special interest in birds and all aspects of Iceland's natural history. His incredible in-depth knowledge of his home country also extends to geological, historical and cultural aspects—including the famous sagas—which he delights in sharing.

Price, Terms, and Conditions

Price: \$4990 per person/double occupancy; single supplement: \$700. Deposit of \$500 per person is required along with the reservation form. This cost is based on a minimum of 10 people.

Price includes:

- All meals and accommodations as indicated in the itinerary
- Services of Mass Audubon naturalist leader
- Services of local birding guide and drivers
- All excursions, permits, and entrance fees
- Transportation within Iceland starting and ending at Keflavik International Airport.
- All tips and gratuities – with at least 10 participants
- Medical evacuation insurance
- Carbon offset for international flights

Price excludes:

- International airfare to/from Keflavik International Airport
- Porterage
- Passport and visa fees; travel insurance
- Airport taxes; excess baggage charges
- Items of a personal nature, including alcoholic beverages, snacks, laundry, and telephone calls; other items not specifically mentioned as included.

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 \$500 deposit.** Deposits can be by check or credit card (Visa or MasterCard). We reserve the right to decline your application. 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 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'll 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 2018) 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.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS: U.S. citizens must have a valid passport (good for 3 months past departure) but do not need a visa for visits under 90 days.

FLIGHTS: **You, the traveler, are responsible for booking and paying for your own international flights.** Once you reserve your space, we'll provide you with suggested flights and tell you which flights our staff 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.

TRIP INSURANCE: A brochure and application for optional trip cancellation, illness and baggage insurance will be sent to you upon registration. We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself. See www.insuremytrip.com

PHOTOS: Mass Audubon reserves the right to make use of any photographs taken by our guides on the tour or photos shared with us by tour participants. We guarantee that no photos of a compromising nature will be used. If you have questions or concerns, please contact us.

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 \$300 per person fee. For cancellations between 120 and 90 days prior to departure, all deposits are forfeit, but any balance paid beyond that is refundable. There are no refunds of any kind 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 (see attached). Travelers will be expected to abide by the terms set forth in the invoice. During the tour, travelers are asked to respect and follow the directions of their guide and leader.

Mass Audubon Natural History Travel Traveler Registration and Waiver

Name (1) _____ Date of Birth: _____
(as shown on your passport)

Name (2) _____ Date of Birth: _____
(as shown on your passport)

Address: _____

Cell phone #: _____ (needed during the tour)

Home/office #: _____ (Is this your preferred number for us to use routinely? Yes/No)

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.

DEPOSIT: \$500 per person

- Please find my enclosed check (payable to "Massachusetts Audubon Society")
- Please charge my credit card
MasterCard Visa

Card #: _____ Exp.: _____ CVV/CVC: _____

Signature: _____

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Passport #: _____ Expiration: _____

Food Allergies? _____

Food Requirements / Special Diet? _____

Allergies to medications, insects, or other? _____

(if yes, you must carry your own EpiPen or medications)

Is there anything else we should know about your health that might impact your ability to participate comfortably on this trip? Please describe: _____

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, PLEASE NOTIFY:

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Primary phone: _____ Secondary phone: _____

Please read and sign the back of this form →

Massachusetts Audubon Society, Inc.

RELEASE AND ASSUMPTION OF RISK

I would like to participate in the birding and nature tour named above (the “Tour”) organized by Massachusetts Audubon Society, Inc. (“Mass Audubon”). I am aware that participation in a Mass Audubon tour involves risk, including, but not limited to, the hazards of living in and traveling over unpredictable terrain often in remote areas without adequate medical facilities, exposure to disease and infection, being subject to the forces of nature, and travel by airplane and motor vehicle. In addition, I understand and acknowledge that, if I participate in the Tour, one or more of the risks described above or set forth below could result in or cause bodily injury or death to me or damage to personal property of mine: physical exertion; travel by foot, plane, train, auto, vans, bus, boat or other conveyance; consumption of food and beverages; civil unrest, terrorism, banditry, or criminal activity; high altitude; inadequate medical facilities or service.

I acknowledge that I have received and read carefully information describing the Tour, including, but not limited to, the Terms and Conditions and the paragraph in the Terms and Conditions entitled “Your Responsibility.”

I acknowledge that the enjoyment and excitement of touring is derived, at least in part, from the inherent risks incurred by travel and activity beyond the accepted safety and routine of life at home or work, and that part of the reason I have decided to participate in the Tour is to experience this enjoyment and excitement. I further acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to discuss with my medical provider the medical risks involved in the Tour. I have also had the opportunity to research the Tour and to understand fully the risks involved.

Therefore, notwithstanding the risks of participating in the Tour set forth and as described above, and in consideration of Mass Audubon permitting me to participate in the Tour:

(1) I AGREE TO ASSUME AND ACCEPT ALL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TOUR; AND
(2) I HEREBY RELEASE AND FOREVER DISCHARGE AND COVENANT AND AGREE NOT TO SUE, AND AGREE TO INDEMNIFY AND HOLD HARMLESS, MASS AUDUBON AND ITS DIRECTORS, OFFICERS, EMPLOYEES, AND AGENTS (COLLECTIVELY, THE “RELEASEES”), AND EACH OF THE RELEASEES, FROM AND AGAINST AND IN REGARD TO ANY AND ALL CLAIMS, DEMANDS, ACTIONS, SUITS, LOSSES, COSTS, DAMAGES, AND EXPENSES (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, ATTORNEYS’ FEES), AND ANY AND ALL LIABILITIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF EVERY KIND AND DESCRIPTION, WHICH I SHALL OR MAY HAVE AGAINST THE RELEASEES OR ANY ONE OR MORE OF THEM ARISING OUT OF, OR IN CONNECTION WITH, MY PARTICIPATION IN THE TOUR.

I agree that this Release and Assumption of Risk shall be (a) binding upon me and my heirs, executors, legal representatives, successors, and assigns, and (b) deemed a contract made under seal under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and shall be governed by, and construed and enforced in accordance with, the internal laws of said Commonwealth without regard to its principles of conflict of laws.

I HAVE CAREFULLY READ, UNDERSTAND, AND VOLUNTARILY SIGN THIS RELEASE AND ASSUMPTION OF RISK.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name (s) (Please Print) _____