



Bird watching sites in Westfjords

Iceland



Bird watching sites in:

- Bolungarvík
- Ísafjörður
- Álftafjörður
- Súgandafjörður
- Önundarfjörður
- Vigur island
- Hestfjörður

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This map shows several good birdwatching sites in NW Iceland. About 90 species have been seen at these sites and in the surrounding area since the year 2000. Most of them are breeding birds in Iceland or birds which migrate through Iceland to Greenland and/or Canada. Some are winter visitors such as Grey Heron, King Eider and Iceland Gull, or annual vagrants such as Bohemian Waxwing.



Black-tailed Godwits chicks in hands of a woman BB ©

The best time to watch birds is in spring (mid-May) because many migrating birds stop off in Iceland to refuel, and it is also the best time to find vagrants. The best time of day is early in the morning or in the evening when breeding birds are most active and the males are busy displaying.



White sandy beach in Önundarfjörður. ÁSH ©

The Westfjords region is renowned for its long coastline and the huge sea cliffs containing millions of seabirds. The dramatic scenery and abundance of birds have long attracted visiting birdwatchers but until now there has been little information on where to watch birds in the area.

The West Fjords region has been divided into 12 maps and this is the first map to be published. This map is number 2 in the series and it covers the birdwatching sites in Bolungarvík (town), Ísafjörður (town), Álftafjörður (fjord), Súgandafjörður (fjord), Önundarfjörður (fjord), Vigur (island) and Hestfjörður (fjord).

The Westfjords Natural History Institute is publishing data on the region's birdlife and the project is sponsored by the Westfjords Growth Agreement. The photographs have been taken by Böðvar Þórisson (BÞ), Bastien Louboutin (BL) and Ágúst Svavar Hrólfsson (ÁSH). The photograph of the Golden Plover on the front page is by Bastien Louboutin.



Phalarope BL ©





Great Northern Diver BL ©

Bolungarvík

There are three good birding sites in Bolungarvík: the harbour area, Lake Syðradalsvatn and the area around the museum at Ósvör. There are also hiking routes in the area which provide you with a chance to see birds such as Rock Ptarmigan, Snow Bunting and Northern Wheatear. In winter there may be up to one thousand Snow Buntings being fed by the locals in their gardens. Between the town and the museum at Ósvör there is a Common Eider colony with 200-300 nests and an Arctic Tern colony, numbering about 500 pairs. It is best to wear a helmet and have somewhere to wash your clothes afterwards when visiting the Arctic Tern colony!

In the harbour area in winter there may be up to a thousand gulls (Glaucous, Iceland and Great Black-backed Gull) and also up to one thousand Common Eider. A few Iceland Gulls (juv-2nd winter) can be seen in the harbour in the summer. King Eider is sometimes seen in the spring.



Black-tailed Godwit ASH ©

Harlequin Duck is common around Ósvör in winter and a few birds can be found in the harbour in spring. The lighthouse (close to Ósvör) is also a good place to see Harlequin Duck and sometimes it is possible to see whales (Minke Whale and/or Humpback Whale). In winter Lake Syðradalsvatn is frozen most of the time but is free of ice from late April or the beginning of May. At Lake

Syðradalsvatn about 20-30 species can be seen in a day in May and early June. Both Red-throated Diver and Great Northern Diver breed at the lake; it is unusual in Iceland for these species to breed on the same lake. Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser and Common Eider are common in the area. Black-tailed Godwit is a new breeder (since 2004) in the area.



Bolungarvík harbour BL ©



Whooper Swans, lake Syðradal Bp ©

Ísafjörður

The town of Ísafjörður is located in a fjord called Skutulsfjörður. At the head of the fjord there are mudflats which are important for waders and other birds. These mudflats are close to the road so it is easy to watch birds from your car. Waders, ducks and Red-throated Diver are common in the area.



Red-throated Diver Bp ©

At least two pairs of Long-tailed Duck breed in the area and this species can therefore be seen throughout the year. Goosander can be found in winter and spring but is rare in summer. Three species of wader winter in the area: Eurasian Oystercatcher (20-50), Common Redshank (about 10) and Purple Sandpiper (300-400).

At Engidalur the mudflats host a variety of birds. These mudflats extend to towards the river mouth of Tunguá and Ísafjörður airport. Migrating birds such as Ruddy Turnstone and Red Knot feed in the area in May. Occasionally a flock of Brent Geese (160 in April 2011) can be seen in spring. There are two pools at Engidalur, both of which are close to the road so it is easy to watch birds from your car. Harlequin Duck can be seen close to the river mouth in Engidalur and at Tunguá.

Álftafjörður

Súðavík is a small town in the fjord Álftafjörður. In Súðavík there is a pool on the sandbank Langeyri. Red-throated Diver, Common Eider, Arctic Tern and Black-headed Gull are some of



Ringed Plover in display Bp ©



Arctic Tern BL ©

the species that breed around the pond. Rock Ptarmigan breeds just above the town so there is a good chance of seeing this species in display or with chicks, depending on the season. North of Súðavík is an excellent area to see Harlequin Duck throughout the year, although it is scarce from late June to September. The best sites for Harlequin Duck are simply from the road 61, between Ísafjörður and Súðavík. At the end of the fjord there are mudflats with a variety of waders feeding there. Gyrfalcon and White-tailed Eagle are sometimes seen in the fjord or fjords east of Álftafjörður.

Súgandafjörður

Súgandafjörður is narrow and shallow fjord. Near the mouth of the fjord there is a small town, Suðureyri. Long-tailed Duck is common in winter (about 500 birds). In winter and early spring there is also a chance of Goosander and

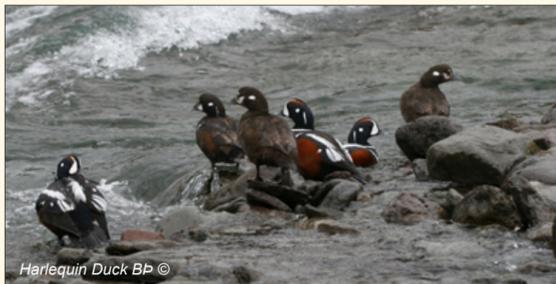


Long-tailed Duck ASH ©

King Eider. Iceland Gull is a winter visitor in Suðureyri as in many harbours in NW Iceland. Common Eider is the most common species in Súgandafjörður. Harlequin Duck is common to the north of Suðureyri, between the town and the bay Keravík. The road in that area can be difficult for small vehicles, especially in winter. The road is only about one kilometre long so it is short enough to walk.

Önundarfjörður

Önundarfjörður is probably the most important area for waders in north-west Iceland. About 1,000 Common Redshank, 1,000-2,000 Red Knot, 300-600 Sanderling, 200-300 Ringed Plover, and 100 Black-tailed Godwit feed in the area in spring. In late summer about 100 Red-necked Phalarope feed in the estuary before departing. Common Eider, European Wigeon, Greylag Goose, Black-headed Gull and Arctic Tern are common in the area. There are five Common Eider colonies in the area and sometimes King Eider is seen in one of the colonies. Permission is needed from the landowners to visit a Common Eider colony (see regulation 252/1996).



Harlequin Duck Bp ©

North of the birding site there is an area called Holtstangi/Holtstangi with a white sandy beach and extensive mudflats. This is an important feeding area for waders. There is also a Common Eider colony here but permission is needed to visit the colony. A research programme on Ringed Plovers has been under way in the area since 2004 and many birds have been individually ringed with coloured rings. It is also possible to see Black-tailed Godwits which have been colour-ringed in the fjord. Behind the church (Holt) there is track which you can walk or drive along in a 4WD vehicle. This is a good walking route with birds in wetlands, grassland and mudflats.



King Eider in a Eider colony Bp ©

Other sites

Vigur

There are daily boat trips from Ísafjörður to the island of Vigur during the summer (see map). The island is home to Atlantic Puffin and Common Eider colonies. Black Guillemot, Arctic Tern, Snow Bunting, White Wagtail, Meadow Pipit and Northern Wheatear are all common.

Hestfjörður

Hestfjörður is one the best sites for King Eider in the Westfjords. King Eiders can be seen here throughout the year but are most frequently reported in spring and early summer. Up to seven birds have been seen in a single day.



Regulation nr. 252/1996

The Common Eider colony is protected between 15 April and 14 July every year. Unauthorized access or disturbance of any kind is not permitted within the protected area without the permission of the landowner.

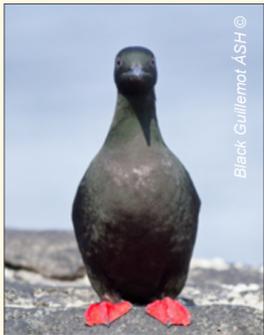


Puffin's Bp ©

Legent	
Status:	
Birdnames in bold, breeder (probably) in the area	
Permanent (P)	Year-round resident.
Summer (S)	Apr - Sep.
Winter (W)	Oct - Mar.
Migrant (M)	Present in spring or autumn.
Abundance:	
Common (c)	Present in proper habitat in moderate to large numbers annually.
Uncommon (u)	Present in proper habitat in small to moderate numbers annually.
Rare (r)	Present in proper habitat singly or in very small numbers annually.
Irregular (i)	Vagrant species recorded less than annually.
Accidental (acc)	Five or fewer recorded since the year 2000.



Redwing ASH ©



Black Guillemot ASH ©

Black Guillemot common in Vigur iceland.



Gyrfalcon, rare in the area but occasionally seen in spring and autumn ASH ©

English	Latine	Bol.	Ísafj.	Álftafj.	Súg.	Önund.
Whooper Swan	Cygnus cygnus	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r
Pink-footed Goose	Anser brachyrhynchus	M-u	M-u	M-u	M-u	M-u
Greylag Goose	Anser anser	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	M-acc			M-acc	M-acc
Barnacle Goose	Branta leucopsis	M-u	M-u	M-u	M-u	M-u
Brent Goose	Branta bernicla	M-r	M-u	M-r	M-r	M-r
Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadoma	S-r	S-r			S-u
Mandarin Duck	Aix galericulata	M-acc	M-acc		M-acc	
Eurasian Wigeon	Anas penelope	S-u	S-u	S-r	S-r	S-c, W-r
American Wigeon	Anas americana	M-acc				
Gadwall	Anas strepera	S-r				
Eurasian Teal	Anas crecca		S-c, W-r	S-c	S-u	S-c, W-r
Green-winged Teal	Anas carolinensis	M-acc	M-acc			M-acc
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c
Northern Pintail	Anas acuta	M-r				
Northern Shoveler	Anas clypeata	M-acc				M-acc
Common Pochard	Aythya ferina		M-acc			
Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula	S-c	S-c, W-r	S-c	S-u	S-c
Greater Scaup	Aythya marila	S-c	S-u			S-u
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c
King Eider	Somateria spectabilis	S-r, W-u	P-r	P-r	P-r	P-r
Harlequin Duck	Histrionicus histrionicus	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c
Long-tailed Duck	Clangula hyemalis	S-u, W-c	P-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c
White-winged Scoter	Melanitta deglandi		M-acc			
Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus serrator	S-c, W-u	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c
Goosander	Mergus merganser	S-u	P-r		S-u, W-c	S-r, W-u
Rock Ptarmigan	Lagopus muta	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c
Red-throated Diver	Gavia stellata	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u
Great Northern Diver	Gavia immer	S-u, W-r	W-r	W-r	W-r	W-r
Northern Fulmar	Fulmarus glacialis	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u
Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus	M-u	M-u	M-u	M-u	M-u
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c
European Shag	Phalacrocorax aristotelis	S-r, W-u	S-r, W-u	S-r, W-u	S-r, W-u	S-r, W-u
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	W-i	W-r	W-i	W-i	W-i
White-tailed Eagle	Haliaeetus albicilla	P-i	P-r	P-r	P-i	P-r
Merlin	Falco columbarius	P-r	P-r	P-r	P-r	P-r
Gyrfalcon	Falco rusticolus	P-r	P-r	P-r	P-r	P-r
Common Coot	Fulica atra	M-acc				
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus	S-c	P-c	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r
Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
European Golden Plover	Pluvialis apricaria	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
Northern Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus	M-acc	M-acc			M-acc
Red Knot	Calidris canutus	M-i	M-c	M-c	M-c	M-c
Sanderling	Calidris alba	M-r	M-u	M-r	M-r	M-c
Purple Sandpiper	Calidris maritima	P-r	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c
Dunlin	Calidris alpina	S-r	S-u	S-u	S-u	S-c
Ruff	Philomachus pugnax					M-acc
Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago	S-c	S-c, W-i	S-c, W-i	S-c	S-c, W-i
Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	S-c	S-u	S-u	S-r	S-c
Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica					M-acc
Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
Common Redshank	Tringa totanus	S-c	S-c, W-r	S-c	S-c	S-c
Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	M-i				
Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres	M-u	M-c	M-c	M-c	M-c
Red-necked Phalarope	Phalaropus lobatus	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
Arctic Skua	Stercorarius parasiticus	S-u	S-u	S-u	S-u	S-u
Little Gull	Larus minutus	W-i				
Black-headed Gull	Larus ridibundus	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-r
Mew Gull	Larus canus	S-r	S-r			
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus	S-u	S-u	S-u	S-u	S-u
Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	P-u	P-u	P-u	P-u	P-u
Iceland Gull	Larus glaucoides	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c	S-u, W-c
Glaucous Gull	Larus hyperboreus	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c
Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c
Black-legged Kittiwake	Rissa tridactyla	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u
Arctic Tern	Sterna paradisaea	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
Common Guillemot	Uria aalge	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r
Brünnich's Guillemot	Uria lomvia	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r
Razorbill	Alca torda	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r	S-r, W-r
Black Guillemot	Cepphus grylle	S-u, W-u	S-r, W-u	S-r, W-u	S-r, W-u	S-r, W-u
Little Auk	Alle alle	W-u	W-u	W-u	W-u	W-u
Atlantic Puffin	Fratercula arctica	S-u	S-u	S-u	S-r	S-r
Short-eared Owl	Asio flammeus	P-i	P-i	P-i	P-i	P-u
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	M-r	M-i	M-r	M-i	M-i
House Martin	Delichon urbicum	M-i				
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
White Wagtail	Motacilla alba	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
Bohemian Waxwing	Bombycilla garrulus	W-r	W-r	W-r	W-r	W-r
Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	P-r	P-c	P-c	P-u	P-u
European Robin	Erithacus rubecula		P-i	P-i		
Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c	S-c
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	W-r	W-r	W-r	W-r	W-r
Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris	W-i				
Redwing	Turdus iliacus	S-c, W-r	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u	S-c, W-u
Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus	W-i				
Common Raven	Corvus corax	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c
Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	W-i	W-i			
Redpoll	Carduelis flammea	S-u, W-r	P-c	P-c	S-u, W-r	P-u
Snow Bunting	Plectrophenax nivalis	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c	P-c