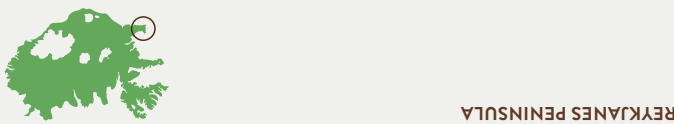


BIRDING ON REYKJANES PENINSULA



EXPECTED ACCESS RULES IN REYKJANES GEOPARK:

- Do not break any natural formations or damage them in any other manner.
- Refrain from disturbing vegetation as much as possible.
- Do not litter – throw any rubbish you may have into a rubbish bin.
- There are no lavatories along the paths. Use the lavatories provided at the starting point of the trail. Show due consideration if you should need to relieve yourself on the way.
- There is no water to be found along the trail. Be prepared.
- Do not travel alone in the mountains. Let someone know where you plan to go before starting.
- Remember to take protective clothing with you. Proper hiking boots are a must on hiking and mountaineering trips.



The official source for safe adventure in Iceland



1. PUBLISHED 2017

Publisher:
Reykjanes UNESCO Global Geopark

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Map Design:
Borgarmynd

Sponsor:
Uppbyggingarsjóður Suðurnesja

Layout and design:
M74. Studio

Printing:
ODDI

Birdwatching in Reykjanes is a cooperative project between Þekkingarseturs Suðurnesja, Náttúrustofu Suðvesturlands, Reykjanes UNESCO Global Geopark and Markaðstofu Reykjaness. Birdwatching map of Northeast Iceland can be found on the website birdingtrail.is.

BIRDING ON REYKJANES PENINSULA

Iceland is known for its unique landscape and unspoiled nature, and its bird fauna has long been a subject of interest. It is an island of very few predators and is therefore important for breeding bird species. With spring, the migrating bird species come in from Europe and breed over the summer while the more Arctic species migrate from the north and spend the winter around the Icelandic coast. Iceland has 75 regular breeding species and a number of occasional nesting bird species. Although Iceland's bird fauna may not be species-rich, it is in many ways unique. Iceland is home to very large seabird - , wader - , and waterfowl populations. Indeed, Iceland holds a significant part of the world population of many given species. For example, half of the population of European Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*), Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), 40% of the Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), and a big portion of the Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) nest in Iceland. Many species have their names drawn from the fascinating land out in the North Atlantic. Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*), for example, has never bred in Iceland but stays here over the winter. The Nearctic Red Knot (*Calidris canutus islandica*) migrates to its breeding sites in northern Greenland and the Canadian High Arctic with a stop for food in the west part of Iceland along with other arctic breeding migrants. Sightings of around 400 bird species have been confirmed to date within Iceland, many of which are common or rare vagrants. With all these vagrant, transit birds, breeding and wintering species the Reykjanes peninsula is an ideal birdwatching area.

This map describes sites that are good for birdwatching and gives information about how to get there and where to find scarce species that are frequently seen in the area. The best time for a birding trip depends on the goal. If you are in Iceland for breeding species, then late May to June is the best time, when all migrants have arrived and birds are conspicuous, defending their territories. If the goal is, however, to try out for new rare American species for your western Palearctic list, we recommend that you put on your raincoat and come in the period from September to November. This map focuses on where one could find scarce species, such as Harlequin Ducks (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) or Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*), but the more common species, for example Meadow pipits (*Anthus pratensis*) and Golden Plovers, are not mentioned as they are very easy to find in many areas.

Accessibility to most of the birding spots is good as most roads are paved; unpaved roads are specially marked. Concerning gear, good binoculars are necessary but a spotting scope is always useful.

Walking is permitted on uncultivated land. However, please avoid taking shortcuts over fenced areas, pastures and private plots. Follow the rules in areas under special wildlife or vegetation protection. Follow marked footpaths, where they exist. These paths make for a safer trip, as well as reduce wear and tear on sensitive natural elements.

Landowners may not hinder passage of walkers alongside rivers, lakes and the ocean, or on tracks and paths. There should be a gate or stile close to any hindrances.

VATNSLEYSUVÍK
Vatnsleysuströnd is one of few vegetative places on the Reykjanes Peninsula. It is a coastal area from Vatnsleysuvík to Vogar. The peninsula has little or no running surface water so the ponds in that area attract many birds. The main road is paved and good for all types of cars but the access to the coast is mostly through private roads. Vatnsleysuvík (1) has a fish farm that attracts many gull species and the farm Stóra-Vatnsleysa has an Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) colony, breeding Common Eiders (*Somateria mollissima*) and waders.

KÁLFATJARNARKIRKJA
Traveling west towards the village of Vogar you will see a church called Kálfatjarnarkirkja (2) and a golf course where you can park and walk down to the coast. Near the shore you can find a little pond where ducks and waders are often seen and on the sandy beach and rocky shore beyond the rocky boulders you can find feeding waders in spring and autumn. The landfill holds passerines like Meadow Pipits and Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) and one should always keep a lookout for vagrants in these areas. On the road to Vogar there are a few ponds seen from the road that are worth a look. The best way to look at this area is to walk the whole coast and go on top of the landfill to scan the ponds on the way.

VOGAR
Vogar (3) is as small village on the east side of Stakksfjörður. There is large pond close to the harbour with sedge and a small island. In summer, there are breeding ducks such as Tufted Ducks (*Aythya fuligula*) and Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) hiding in the sedge with feeding Red-necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*).

The harbour is a good stop for gulls and waders and the occasional wintering Harlequin Ducks. The sandy beach next to the pond is good in the migration period but the hidden pearl is the mudflat west of Vogar. Turn left when entering the village; you will drive through the village and end up on a gravel road that will lead you to a big fenced off fish farm. Go towards the gate and take another left until you are in a parking area. From there on you will follow a walking path next to the fish farm that will lead you to a big mudflat with patches of seaweed with many waders and gulls and breeding Northern Fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) in the cliffs above. This is a hot-spot during migration.

ÞORBJÖRN AND SÓLBREKKUSKÓGUR
There are very few trees in Reykjanes, or in Iceland for that matter, and long may it be so but the Suðurnes Forestry Association has been trying to introduce alien and native trees to the peninsula with some success. These plantations are big attraction to passerines that have lost their way migrating both in the Eastern and Western Hemisphere. The largest ones are located inland between Vogar and Grindavík. The bigger one, Þorbjörn/Selskógur (18), is on the north side of the hill Þorbjarnarfell, north of Grindavík. The other one is called Sölbrekkuskógur (4) and is next to the pond Seltjörn, between Vogar and the Blue Lagoon.

REYKJANESBÆR
Reykjanesbær (5) is a town divided into two districts, Njarðvík and Keflavík. Njarðvík has a salt-marsh and ponds close to the coast that attract waders, ducks, geese and gulls, especially on high tide. American Wigeon (*Anas americana*) is seen almost annually on the biggest pond, and many vagrants have been spotted there. The harbours in Keflavík and in Helgavík (west of Keflavík) are good places to scan for vagrants such as King Eiders (*Somateria spectabilis*), White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta deglandi*) and Velvet Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*) in large flocks of Eiders. Fulmars and Kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*) nest on the cliffs north of Helgavík and you can see auks and other seabirds from the lighthouse on the edge of the cliff. In search of vagrants one should always target towns on the peninsula and look for passerines in gardens and parks.

GARDUR - KALMANSTJÖRN

GARDUR
Travelling from Keflavík to the tip of the peninsula one can see Snow Buntings (*Plectrophenax nivalis*), Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*), young Gyrfalcons (*Falco rusticolus*) and Merlins (*Falco columbarius*). About 10 km north of Reykjanesbær is a town named Gardur (6). Gardur has one of the best vagrant ponds on the peninsula. Birds coming from the Atlantic often stop on these ponds for a rest. Many good species have been seen there, for example Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*), American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinicus*), and many others. There are three ponds in Gardur: Útskálaski, Miðhúsaski, and Gerðaski. It is possible to walk around the ponds or even drive (4x4). Útskálaski usually has the smallest diversity but the grass and fields around the pond are worth checking. Miðhúsaski often offers close look at waders, sitting gulls and ducks, best seen when located at the houses on the southwest side. Gerðaski can be scoped from the town's swimming pool and from the road on the northeast part of the pond. Looking at the sea from spring to autumn can produce flocks of Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*), occasional European Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*), skuas (*Stercorarius* sp.), Atlantic Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*), and other seabirds.

GARDSKAGAVITI
The northernmost part of the peninsula has two lighthouses where you can find public toilets. The area around the lighthouses at Garðskagi (7) is a known migration route and birds flock in from the highlands, and from Greenland and Canada. Seabirds fly close to shore on their way to the feeding grounds in Faxaflói. Scanning the sea to the north can be good for whale watching and seabird watching. The area is ideal for passing migrants as well as for rare vagrants. Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*) are seen annually, wintering eiders, other sea ducks, and Great Northern Divers are found feeding on fish and mollusks close to land. Dogs are not allowed to walk free in the area. One of the best ways to find rarities in the area is to walk the landfill from the fish factory in Gardur all the way to the lighthouse at Garðskagi. It is a good, paved path with birds on both sides! There is a gravel road close to Garðskagaviti which runs south.

That road goes next to a farm called Ásgarður. On fields close to Ásgarður one can see huge flocks of European Golden Plovers in September - October. Annually there are American Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis dominica*) mixed in the groups with occasional Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*). In summer these fields have breeding Meadow Pipits, plovers, Whimbrels, Eurasian Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Arctic Terns, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*). The coast from Garðskagaviti to Sandgerði is a well-known area for bird watchers. Unfortunately, there are many private areas there but the golf course at Hafurbjarnarstaðir and Þörodsstaðir/Nátthagi is placed next to a large pond with good places for spotting scope and walking the shore. Have a lookout for Rock Ptarmigans in the lava field and in the grass/snow in this area, especially east of Sandgerði and around the road close to Hafurbjarnarstaðir. There are ponds in many places near the shore on private land (Flankastaðir and Klöpp) so again, it is good to walk the shoreline.

SANDGERÐI
When you enter Sandgerði (8) coming from Gardur you will see a small pond on the right, a large pond on the left and a shallow pond a bit farther on the left. There are many breeding ducks in the larger pond over the summertime, and gulls clean themselves in this freshwater pond all year round. Don't skip the small ponds, there is always a good chance of a vagrant. In recent years there have been Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*), Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*), Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) and Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) on the small ponds. There is a hide at the side of the big pond but we don't recommend it as it is badly located, chances are high that you have flushed all the birds away before entering the hide. After passing the small pond on the right, take the small gravel road next to the old fish factory and drive or walk to the edge of the sea. Pipes running from the fish factories wash pieces of fish to the beaches which gulls, worms and waders feed on. These are famous stopover sites for Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*), Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*), Ringed Plovers, Golden Plovers, Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) and other waders. Please be on the lookout for color-ringed Sanderlings and Oystercatchers, probably ringed in the Sudurnes Science and Learning Center. The pipe is a great attraction for gulls and fulmars and in winter there are always a few Blue Fulmars close to the pipe. Sandgerði is a big attraction for gulls, such as Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*), Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*), Iceland Gull, Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*), and Common Gull (*Larus canus*). One should always be on the lookout for vagrant gulls such as Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*), Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*), American Herring Gull (*Larus smithsonianus*), Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*), Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*), or Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*).

The Sudurnes Science and Learning Center is located at Garðvegur 1 with toilets and great facilities for eating your own lunch. It is also a museum that offers two exciting exhibitions if you are interested in learning more about Icelandic nature and wildlife, both above and below sea level, as well as researches related to the areas.

Sandgerði harbour and mudflat is one of the most important places for migrating birds and breeding birds in the area. The mudflat can be looked at from many different points of view but under the chicken farm in the south part you can find dense groups of waders. Have your eyes open for Gyrfalcons and Merlins hunting near the shore. Entering the mudflat on motor vehicles is forbidden.

South of the mudflat is a rocky shore. On that shore we have one of the few spots of wintering Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*).

No one knows where the birds breed but there are about 5-15 birds seen every winter in this area. Total number of Curlews in the wintertime in Iceland is around 40-70, with very few records of breeding Curlews. South of the rocky shore is a long sandy beach which carries large numbers of waders.

NORÐURKOT
After driving past the harbour area along Stafnesvegur-road to the south you can see many ponds on the way that you should scope carefully. The best ones are at the Norðurkot (9) area. This is the biggest eider colony on the peninsula, and here the farmers collect down for export. It is closed during the breeding time, except the paved road itself. You should never drive fast through there in summertime because there is an Arctic tern colony close to the road and the birds use the road as a sitting area. The area is watched 24 hours a day during the breeding season and the area is fenced off with nets. Intruders, such as foxes, minks, and gulls that enter the area are shot.

HVALSNES
Going further south you will eventually see a beautiful stone church of Hvalsnes (10), where you can park and walk the area. By the sea you will find a small sandy inlet, a good location to spot waders. Between Hvalsnes and Hafnir is a farm called Stafnes which has a parking lot with a short walk to a lighthouse. Shoreline and seabird watching is worth a try in summer and autumn. Close to the lighthouse you can find plunging Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*) and birds going to feeding grounds close to land.

ÓSAR AND HAFNIR
Ósar is a small shallow bay close to the village of Hafnir (11). Ósar has a large sandy mudflat that is exposed on low tide. In the bay you can find all the wader species, and big flocks of ducks are seen both in autumn and winter. Winter counts in the area have around 5-10 Great Northern Divers, hundreds of ducks, such as Long-tailed Ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*), Mallards, Harlequin Ducks, Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*), and Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*), but mainly Common Eiders. Hafnir and Ósabotnar are a good place for wintering Gyrfalcon and Merlin. The Harlequin Duck is one of the most sought after species for visiting birders, as Iceland is its only European breeding ground. Harlequins winter at sea in areas where the sea is rough, and is rarely found on calm, sheltered waters. From late September to mid-April it can be seen at sea close to the harbour in Hafnir. The harbour in Hafnir has pictures of birds and some information about birds in the area. It is a perfect place to set up a scope and look at all the islands and skerries in the cove. Ósar and Hafnir are one of the best places in Iceland for birdwatching in the winter time. Great Skuas (*Stercorarius skua*) and Arctic Skuas (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) nest in the lava and short grass in the Hafnir area.

KALMANSTJÖRN AND HAFNARBERG
Kalmanstjörn is a small cove by a fish farm south of Junkaragerði. The runoff from the fish farm lures in ducks and gulls while big flocks of wintering Harlequins and divers/loons use the area for feeding during winter. Hafnarberg (12) is a bird cliff on the western part of the peninsula. Breeding birds there are Northern Fulmars, Black-legged Kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*), Common Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), Brünnich's Guillemot (*Uria lomvia*), Razorbill (*Alca torda*), and Atlantic Puffin. There is a good parking lot with a bird sign at the start of the route. It takes about 20-30 minutes to walk down to the cliff and on the way you can see breeding Arctic Skuas.

SANDVÍK - GRINDAVÍK

SANDVÍK
Stóra-Sandvík or Sandvík (13) is a small inlet with a big sandy beach, while on the inner part of the inlet is a large pond with brackish water close to the Bridge Between Continents. You can find Whooper Swans (*Cygnus cygnus*), geese, ducks, and gulls on the pond all year round. Red-necked Phalaropes congregate on the pond before the start of the post-breeding migration, with hundreds there in July.

REYKJANES-ELDEY, VALAHNÚKUR, AND KARL
Reykjanes (14) is a small cape at the lower part of the Reykjaneskagi Peninsula. There you can find the only Arctic Tern colony in a geothermal area. Valahnúkur is a hill at the point of the cape. This site is very picturesque and great for seabird watching, along with the breeding Kittiwakes and Northern Fulmars in the southern cliff walls. Karl is a cliff just outside of Valahnúkur with breeding Kittiwakes and a few Fulmars and Razorbills. Further out is an island called Eldey. Eldey is the largest gannet colony in Iceland, with 14,000 - 18,000 pairs, other breeding species are mostly Kittiwakes (3,232 pairs), Common Guillemots (2,700 pairs), Brünnich's Guillemots (510 pairs), and Fulmars.

VÍKUR
Víkur (15) is the sea area out from Hrafnelsstaðaberg. Driving from Reykjanes, you will find a rough gravel road accessible by 4x4. Take the exit close to some old houses. Drive the road till the end and scope the sea. There are big flocks of eiders, and chance of Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), Velvet Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*), or its close relative, White-Winged Scoter (*Melanitta deglandi*).

ARFADALS Vík
Staður is a farm west of the town of Grindavík. There is a fish farm west of Staður with a large runoff that lures in gulls and waders, but the area is closed off from the road. East of Staður is a rocky and a sandy beach that stretches 4-5 km, called Arfadalsvík (16). It is one of the few rocky and sandy high diversity littoral shores on the south coast of Iceland. It is an oasis on a long stretch of the lifeless sandy south coast and therefore a very important area for birds and other littoral, or sublittoral, life. Access is best either from parking near the church at Staður or at the golf course. You can on a 4x4 follow a rough gravel road east of the red fish farm to the east of the golf course. On the way from Arfadalsvík to Grindavík are many ponds and some estuaries that can hold waders, ducks, geese and gulls.

GRINDAVÍK
Grindavík (17) is a town of 3,000 inhabitants. Due to lights and few trees, Grindavík is one of the first destinations for lost American migrants after low pressure systems coming from the west. For that reason, Icelandic bird watchers look in gardens and the shore area in and around the town. Gulls can be seen from the docks and on ponds east and west of Grindavík and one should always have one's eyes open for gull rarities, such as Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*), Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*), and Bonaparte's Gull.

HRAUNSVÍK - KLEIFARVATN

HRAUNSVÍK
Hraunsvík (19) is a bird cliff east of Grindavík. Kittiwakes and Fulmars breed on the cliff, but seabirds, ducks, and marine mammals often catch prey very close to land.

KRÝSUVÍKURBERG
Krýsuvíkurborg (20) is by far the biggest bird cliff on the peninsula. It is about 20 minutes' drive east of Grindavík. The drive from the main road down to the cliff is a rough 4x4 road, but it's worth the walk in summer time. It takes 20-30 minutes to walk the entire cliff slowly. There are approximately 21,000 Black-Legged Kittiwakes, 20,000 Common Guillemots, 2,600 Brünnich's Guillemots and 8,700 Razorbills, few Northern Fulmars, European Shags (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*), puffins, Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*), Herring Gulls, and on top of the cliff are breeding Snow Buntings (*Plectrophenax nivalis*), and Purple Sandpipers (*Calidris maritima*).

KRÝSUVÍK AND KLEIFARVATN
Krýsuvík is a geothermal area on the way to Reykjavík. In that area you can find a few lakes, Grænavatn, Arnarvatn, and Kleifarvatn (21). There you can find breeding water birds such as Great Northern Diver, Whooper Swans, Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*), Mallard and a few pairs of Goosander (*Mergus merganser*). In the fields and the mountains you can find the same meadow breeding birds that breed inland on the peninsula varying according to the vegetation: Golden Plovers, Meadow Pipits, Common Redshanks, Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), Whimbrels, Northern Wheatear, and occasional Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*), Purple Sandpiper, Dunlin, Arctic Skua, Great Skua, and Red-necked Phalarope.

You can find more information at visitreykjanes.is/birding

