



Sunrise Birding LLC
LONGYEARBYEN
June 13 - 15, 2017
TRIP REPORT



Photos: King Eiders, Svalbard Ptarmigan, Red Phalarope, Dovekies by Gina Nichol



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LEADERS:
Gina Nichol
Steve Bird

June 13: Arrival Longyearbyen

By mid-afternoon everyone had arrived in Longyearbyen. After settling in, we met for a brief orientation and then walked down to Sjoskrenten, the “Blue House” bird blind that overlooks the Adventdeltaet that feeds into Adventfjorden. We met in the parking lot of the hotel and set our scopes on the cliffs about Nybyen where Little Auks were flying around. The views were distant and we hoped for better, closer views at some point. A Glaucous Gull was perched on a light post nearby while another one flew over and we soon got to grips with this common gull around Longyearbyen.

On the way down to the water, we had great views of **Snow Buntings** including pairs and singing males. Further on we spotted our first Common Eiders including a female on a nest with a Purple Sandpiper behind her. A Dunlin was nearby and later we saw one displaying flight about the area. There were a few Arctic Skuas around and our first **Barnacle Geese** were seen. We walked to a spot overlooking the mudflats of the delta and were soon looking at some handsome drake King Eiders in amongst the Common Eiders. Also noted here were Long-tailed Duck, Arctic Terns, Black Guillemots and a distant Thick-billed Murre. The weather was quite pleasant allowing us to enjoy prolonged views of all of these birds without having to take shelter in the house.



We turned back and saw a couple of Pink-footed Geese fly in so decided to make our way over and get closer views. A Ringed Plover caught our attention and as we got out to the main road, Paul spotted an Arctic Fox in the background. The fox was still mostly white with a little dark pelage showing and we followed it as it worked down to some Common Eider nests, picked up an egg and then moved back up the hillside. By now, the Pink-foots had departed so we headed back up toward town and had a quick tour of the village before dinner. As we walked up the main street, one Svalbard Reindeer was looking at herself in the reflection of a window and another was feeding along one of the side streets in town.





After a delicious dinner, we retired for the night, noting the daylight still outside. We were going to have to get used to this (and draw the curtains if we wanted darkness to sleep!).

June 14: Birding around Longyearbyen

This morning over breakfast we admired the three Svalbard Reindeer that were grazing in front of our hotel. After breakfast we were joined by our local guide Atle and took van ride to Isdammen, a small lake just outside of Longyearbyen. When we stopped the bus, a male **Red Phalarope** flew off and then later came back and landed right in front of us and hunkered into its nest. We moved away to give the bird some distance and then enjoyed views of drake King Eiders, Ringed Plover,

Dunlin, Purple Sandpipers, **Red-necked Phalarope** and a Common Teal around the lake. Two more female Red Phalaropes were seen preening along the edge of the lake and there were Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese around.



We moved on to the dog kennels where **nesting Common Eider** gave us a show. Females were on nests and some were repositioning and turning their eggs. Males were displaying and chasing each other around and the backdrop sound were the arctic dogs in the kennel welcoming their mid-morning meal.



There were a few Glaucous Gulls flying over and some Arctic Terns were fishing along the shore of the delta. An Arctic Fox came over the hill and took another Eider egg from the colony.

According to Atle, the foxes did this several times a day despite the “protection” of nesting near the dog kennels. Apparently the foxes had figured out that the dogs were in cages so not a threat.



Walking back toward town, we saw a distant Red-throated Loon in the fjord. The Blue House (built by the Svalbard Bird Club) provided a welcome break from the wind. We scanned the fjord and saw Long-tailed Duck, Black Guillemots and more Common Eider.

After lunch, we headed the other way out of town, past the airport. We stopped at Hotellesnet and had nice views of a Red

Phalarope, Arctic Terns, our first Black-legged Kittiwakes, and Barnacle Goose. A few Pink-footed Geese flew over and an Arctic Skua came in very close and perched on the ground near our feet as if to be looking for a handout.



We continued on toward the Bjordalen Valley admiring the stunning view opening up ahead of us. Suddenly our driver stopped for a pair of **Svalbard Ptarmigan** very close to the road. We watched from the van at first and then got out and had great views of both the male and the female as they came close to the road. Turned out, we were very close to Atle's house making these his yard birds!

There were Arctic Foxes running along the scree slopes and as we rounded the corner by the headland, we realized that the afternoon was shaping up to be gorgeous weather-wise – mild, partly sunny, and no wind. The landscape and seascape was stunning with scree slopes and towering cliffs to our left and open ocean to our right. We witnessed clouds of **Dovekie** (Little Auks) flying over the slopes and moved further up the road to get closer to the colony. On the sea, we saw Black Guillemots, many distant Alcids, and a Great Skua. We reached a spot where the Dovekie were quite close to the road and walked up a short distance to get closer views. The birds were busy with “Dovekie love” and we even witnessed (and filmed!) copulation.



We spent plenty of time enjoying the birds and the stunning landscape and the stories of Atle’s involvement in so many aspects of Longyearbyen. We returned to Longyearbyen for the night and bid farewell to our new friend.

June 15: Morning in Longyearbyen. Board Plancius at 4 PM

This morning after breakfast, some of us walked down to the Blue House and looked around. There were Purple Sandpipers, Common Eiders, Black Guillemots and some distant Red-throated Loons. After lunch we visited the Svalbard Museum. We said goodbye to Paul and Maureen and later in the afternoon, our taxi picked us up to take us to the port to board our ship and begin the Svalbard Cruise.

