



Svalbard 12th – 19th June 2026



Clockwise from the top: *Polar Bear, Arctic Fox, Common Eider, Ivory Gull, Atlantic Walrus*

Svalbard

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TOUR SUMMARY

Our tour began in the old mining town of Longyearbyen tucked deep into a fjord on the west coast of Svalbard and there was time to explore and do some urban birding which here meant breeding Purple Sandpipers, Eider and Barnacle Geese on the verges, Snow Buntings displaying off the roof tops and Little Auks whizzing overhead.

The MV Ortelius took us north up the west coast of Spitzbergen where we explored the fjords and bays both by zodiac and on daily landings. The landscape was one of almost unending jagged peaks each with multiple curving glaciers of enormous size inexorably flowing towards the sea where they entered with towering, almost glowing blue cliffs of ice. Those first few days gave us our first unforgettable encounters with Polar Bears, Arctic Foxes, Svalbard Reindeer, Walruses, Bearded Seals and so many auks, Fulmars, terns and gulls before we headed further north to the Arctic pack ice where Blue and Fin Whales greeted our arrival. A surreal two days followed as we manoeuvred our way slowly past various new Seals, Minke Whales and our 11th and 12th Polar Bears. A BBQ at 80.6°N as we drifted in the ice with those bears for nearby company was truly memorable especially as we were the most northerly humans on Earth.

On the route back south we ventured once more into the fjords where close views of blubbery Walruses were had at Poolpynten before a grand finale at the towering seabird cliffs of the Alkhornet where Arctic Fox clubs played in the fresh snow below.

All too soon we were back at Longyearbyen after a magnificent few days at sea.

HIGHLIGHTS

Either for rarity value, excellent views or simply a group favourite

• 12 Polar Bear encounters! • Arctic Foxes including two dens with cubs • ghostly white Ivory Gulls • Northern Fulmars in many shades of grey • thousands of Little Auks & Thick-billed Murres • smelling Atlantic Walruses! • Minke Whales in the pack ice • a lost Ringed Plover almost landing on board at 80°N • flocks of Black Guillemots following the Ortelius in the ice • the sound of glaciers calving and cracking • a Bearded Seal surfacing next to the zodiac	• Snow Buntings singing at every landing we made • colonial breeding Eiders in Longyearbyen • obliging Red-throated Loons • hundreds of Black-legged Kittiwakes feeding in a glacier outflow • amazing high Arctic botany • dinky sized Svalbard reindeer • Blue & Fin Whales before breakfast • seeing Barnacle & Pink-footed Geese on their breeding cliffs • shorelines of Alaskan & Siberian sawn driftwood • never ending daylight • fog Bows	• Polar Bear tracks on the pack ice • Rock Ptarmigan in the old mine works • The towering Alkhornet seabird cliffs • chattering Little Auks on their breeding cliffs • Ringed, Hooded, Harbour and Harp Seals • Glaucous Gull on top of a glacial shooter • Growlers & Bergy Bites • Parasitic Jaegers chasing Black-legged Kittiwakes • so many lichens! • scenery out of finest fantasy films you can imagine
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Longyearbyen church with Snow Buntings on the 'lawn', Rock Ptarmigan and Reindeer in the 'garden' and thousands of Little Auks on the cliffs above.



Amazing to think that many of these breeding Barnacle Geese would have been wintering in north-west Britain while the Pink-footed Geese may have spent the winter in Norfolk.



Common Eider of the northern race—*Somateria mollissima borealis* - note the brighter bill and sails on the back—Jim Willet



Female Common Eider—they were nesting in big groups (often in lines)



Rock Ptarmigan—a male on the old mine workings—Jim Willett



Our first encounter with a Svalbard Reindeer. They are smaller than the mainland ones



Snow Bunting—the only passerine of the trip but such a cool urban bird



Snow Bunting



Purple Sandpipers breed here and have a weird bubbling display song



Glaucous Gull is the default big gull up here



A real treat to be so close to Red-throated Loons



The MV Ortelius - our home for the duration of the trip. She was a fine stable ship with a great views all around when on deck, an excellent crew, fantastic food and not forgetting the Expedition Team that made sure that we got the most out of this adventure.



The views as we headed north were truly astounding



The sudden appearance of three Atlantic Walruses before breakfast went down well



**Polar Bear - words failed to describe how amazing
this chance meeting was**



Polar Bear - Jim Willett



Polar Bear - Alexis Bodycomb



She had amazing climbing skills. Little Auks whizzed by.



Svitjodbreen - up close with a glacier. The first zodiac trip through the brash ice.



A cloud of Little Auks



Old trapping hut on Alicehamna.



The whole gang with the MV Ortelius beyond



Arctic Avens *Dryas octopetala* and Arctic Sorrel *Oxyria digyna*



Lichen



Lichens



Purple saxifrage - *Saxifraga oppositifolia*



The landing at Texas Bar



Texas Bar



And inside!



Arctic Skua - Steve Bielamowicz



Arctic Fox



Arctic Fox scampering



Seligerbreen



Black-legged Kittiwakes at the outflow zone below the Monacobreen



A monstrous Shooter from deep within the Monacobreen



Glaucous Gull on the top of the Shooter



Black-legged Kittiwakes on ice



Arctic Tern



Black Guillemot - Jim Willett



Bearded Seal



The Shoebill...



Hinlopenstretet sound between Spitzbergen and Nordaustlandet was idyllic as we sailed south towards Wilhelmøya



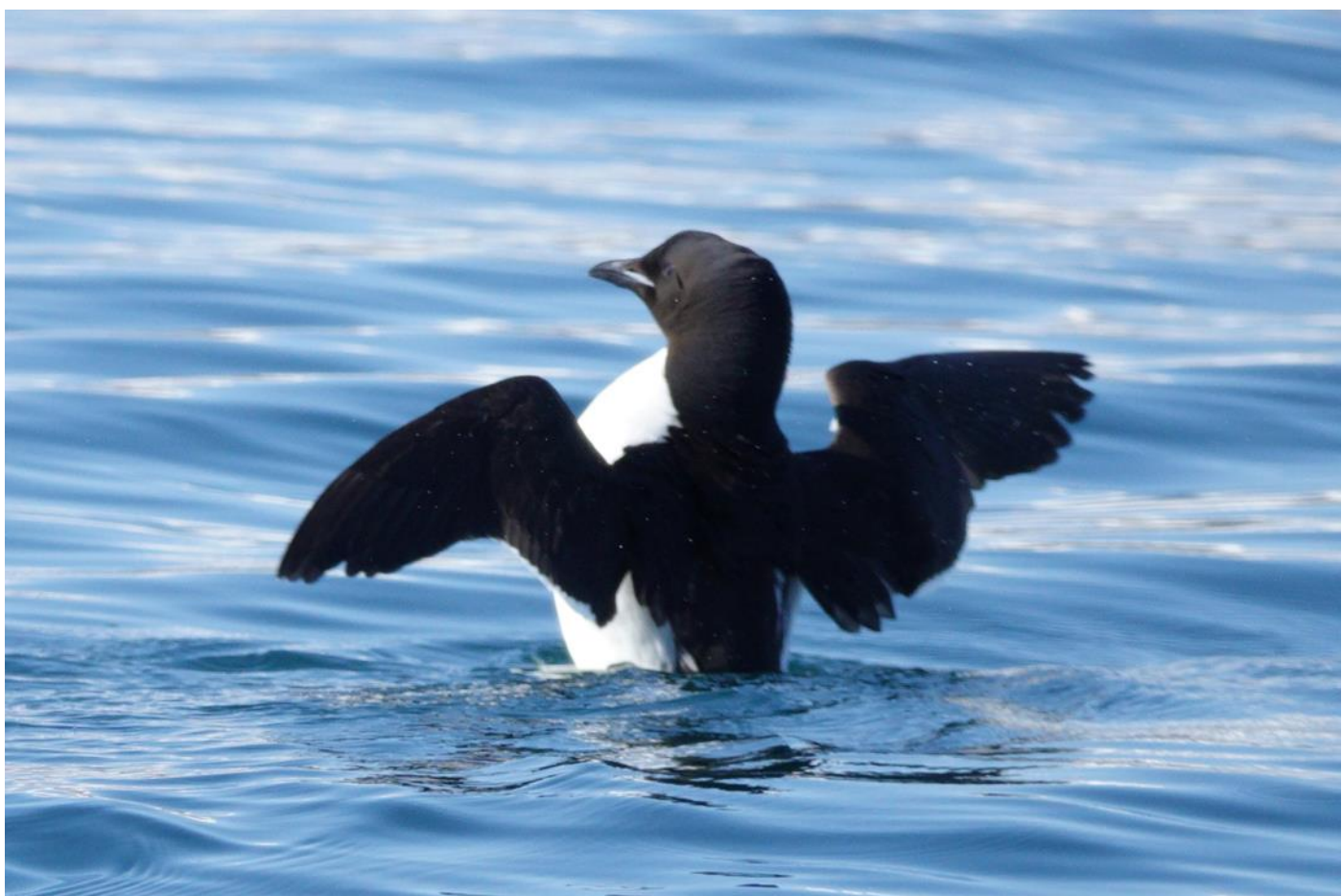
And into the edge of the fast ice



Thick-billed Murre



Thick-billed Murre looking like an Arctic Penguin



Thick-billed Murre



A wavy line of Thick-billed Murres



Black Guillemot



Thick-billed Murres



Off on the zodiacs



A very 'blue' Northern Fulmar



And a paler version - Anne Bielamowicz



Black-legged Kittiwake - Jim Willett



Ivory Gull - Jim Willett



Atlantic Walrus



Bearded Seal - Jim Willett



Ringed Seal



Black Guillemots



Black Guillemot



Two of the six Polar Bears that we saw in an amazing 15 minutes. Five on one island had obviously found something very large and very dead! - Jim Willett



Even the expedition team said they had never seen a Polar Bear this large that had obviously eaten so much that its belly was almost on the ground. He waddled and flumped back in the snow



Flocks of Little Auks whizzed past us the following morning as we neared the pack ice



**Where three Blue Whales greeted us before breakfast. There were
Fin Whales too as we neared the pack ice.**



Blue Whale - there she blows



It is difficult to convey the scale of things once in the pack ice



These Northern Fulmars were always following us



Immature Black Guillemots of the race 'mandtii'. Almost every one in the ice were non breeding youngsters



Amazing compression ridges



A Harp Seal porpoising away from the ship



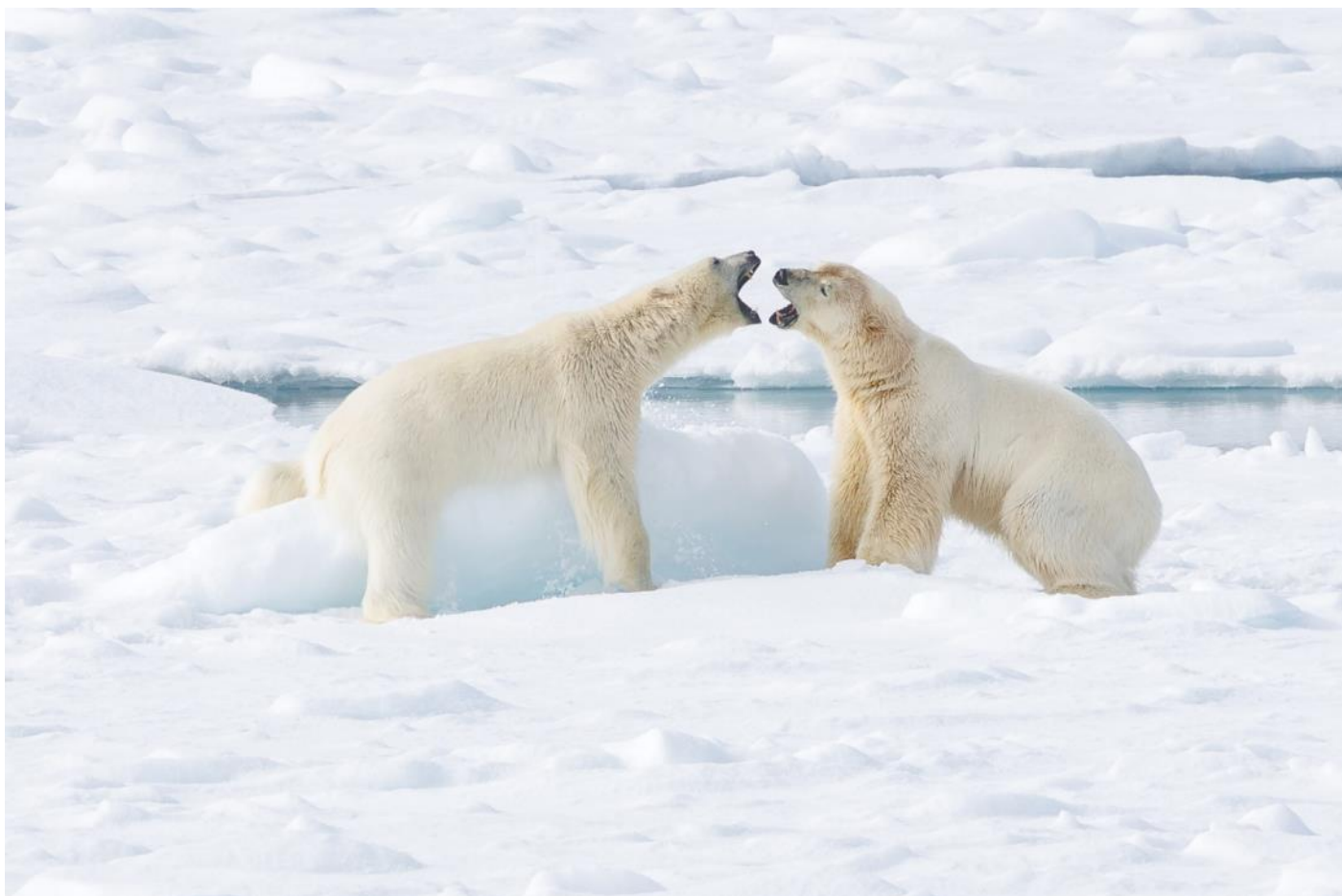
Black-legged Kittiwake and the shadow watchers



Kiss chase Polar Bears



Polar Bear



Playing hard to get - Jim Willett



Jump across! - Jim Willett



BBQ at 80.6°N



The gang along with Ali the expedition leader



Thick-billed Murre - Anne Bielamowicz



Black-legged Kittiwakes fighting over a fish - Anne Bielamowicz



Little Auk - Anne Bielamowicz



Fog Bows



Minke Whale - Anne Bielamowicz



A slightly foggy ice filled morning



Polar Bear tracks below the ship as we passed



Black-legged Kittiwakes - Jim Willett



Quite a view as we headed south - Alexis Bodycomb



Atlantic Puffins - Anne Bielamowicz



Views never to be forgotten



On the beach at Pooleyptnten - the tower here is still used as a marking point for passing shipping and the beach was littered with sawn timber fragments from Alaska that never quite made it to the ships at the end of their river runs. There was very little litter and we collected what we could find.



Atlantic Walrus



Atlantic Walruses settling down to sleep



Atlantic Walrus - flexing its bristles



Atlantic Walrus



Arctic Terns



The mighty Alkhornet that changed its visage every few minutes



Alkhornet has 10,000 Black-legged Kittiwakes and countless Thick-billed Murres



Thick-billed Murres heading back out to sea



Pink-footed Geese looking for a nest site



Svalbard Reindeer



Arctic Fox kits



And back into Longyearbyen as the snow started fall



Amazingly 52 Belugas were at the airport to send us on our way! - Jim Willett



Everyone will forever have a Polar Bear in their heads...

Wildlife Lists for Svalbard June 2026

A = Number of species experienced on tour B = Number of days out of 8 Recorded

C = Highest daily count H = Heard Only with highest number heard. The list includes noteworthy subspecies.

A	BIRD SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	B	C
1	Red-throated Diver /Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	2	2
2	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	8	35
3	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	5	1
4	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	6	12
5	Pale-bellied Brent Goose / Brant Goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	2	20
6	Eurasian Teal / Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	1	30
8	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima mollissima</i>	2	150
9	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima borealis</i>	5	200
10	King Eider	<i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	1	2
11	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	2	2
13	Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus mutus hyperboreus</i>	5	12
14	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	3	6
15	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris arctica</i>	6	10
16	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	1	2
17	Grey Phalarope / Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>	1	1
18	Arctic Skua / Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	5	4
19	Long-tailed Skua / Long-tailed Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>	2	1
20	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	2	3
21	Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	8	12
22	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	8	1000s
23	Ivory Gull	<i>Pagophila eburnea</i>	2	2
24	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	7	100
25	Common Guillemot / Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	2	20
26	Brunnich's Guillemot / Thick-billed Murre	<i>Uria lomvia</i>	8	1000s
27	Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grille mandtii</i>	8	200
28	Little Auk	<i>Alle alle</i>	8	1000s
29	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	5	20
30	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	6	20

	MAMMALS	SCIENTIFIC NAME		
1	Atlantic Walrus	<i>Odobenus rosmarus rosmarus</i>	3	8
2	Bearded Seal	<i>Erignathus barbatus</i>	4	6
3	Harp Seal	<i>Pagophilus groenlandicus</i>	2	6
4	Ringed Seal	<i>Pusa hispida</i>	2	70
5	Hooded Seal	<i>Cystophora cristata</i>	1	1
6	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	2	2
7	Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	4	2
8	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	2	3
9	Fin Whale	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	2	4
10	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	1	1
11	Beluga Whale	<i>Delphinapterus leucas</i>	2	52
12	White-beaked Dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i>	2	5
13	Polar Bear	<i>Ursus maritimus</i>	3	12
14	Arctic Fox	<i>Vulpes lagopus</i>	2	7
15	Svalbard Reindeer	<i>Rangifer tarandus platyrhynchus</i>	4	20

	BOTANY	SCIENTIFIC NAME		
1	White Arctic Mountain Heather	<i>Cassiope tetragona</i>		
2	Arctic Avens	<i>Dryas octopetala</i>		
3	Arctic Sorrel	<i>Oxyria digyna</i>		
4	Arctic Whitlow-Grass	<i>Draba fladnizensis</i>		
5	Polar Willow	<i>Salix polaris</i>		
6	Pygmy Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus pygmaeus</i>		
7	Svalbard Poppy	<i>Oreomecon dahlana</i>		
8	Tufted Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga cespitosa</i>		
9	Purple saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga oppositifolia</i>		
10	Drooping Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga cernua</i>		



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