

## SEVEN WEEKS IN ICELAND

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I HAVE been asked to write something about my recent visit to Iceland — from the point of view of the birds chiefly, as is only right and proper in an article for an ornithological journal; however it is possible that my readers may care to hear something about the country in general before I write anything about the birds in particular.

Getting to Iceland now presents no difficulty. There are frequent services of boats from Britain, Denmark and Norway and these boats are, generally speaking, of modern construction and reasonably comfortable. By consulting time tables it is possible to plan a trip right round the island and this means innumerable visits of short duration to various ports, big and little.

As there is practically no »night« during the summer months, one can view and explore the stopping places by day or night, with equal facility.

The most civilised portion of Iceland is in the neighbourhood of Reykjavik, the capital. This, I understand, is a modern town of some 25,000 inhabitants and is the chief tourist port of entry. Numbers of roads are now being constructed and one sees a good many automobiles but I have yet to hear of motor travel facilities anywhere except in the coastal districts for it must be realised that about two thirds of the island consists of uninhabited desert. Iceland is not nearly so far north as its name implies since it only just touches the Arctic circle at its most northern extremity and the climate is by no means severe as compared with many parts of Northern Europe. It is true that we found the month of June cold and wet during our recent visit, but that we understood was exceptional — the normal June being fairly warm and pleasant.

If I was asked to criticise Iceland from the point of view of its comforts and discomforts, I should at once say — flies and to a limited extent, food. The Iceland black fly is beyond all description for sheer beastliness when one is in the neighbourhood of a river on a fine day. One simply cannot open one's mouth to speak without swallowing them, they bite viciously and in fact reduce one to complete misery. It is true one can wear a veil and gloves and personally I always wore the former but it seriously reduces one's powers of vision (I found it extremely difficult to watch birds with or without field glasses) and is hot and uncomfortable. As regards food — that is certainly good of its kind but one badly feels the loss of all green food in the way of vegetables and fruit; certainly one has potatoes (imported) and I suppose one really has nothing to grumble at, as the bread, milk, butter, coffee, eggs, fish etc. are all as good as one can wish for. The inhabitants we found almost invariably, to be kind, hospitable and pleasant. A few appear to think that visitors are »fair game« as regards extortionate charges but these are the exception rather than the rule and on the whole the country is a cheap one in which to travel — the average charge for board and lodging being 6 Icelandic Crowns per day (say 7.6 pengoes), pony hire 5 Crowns each per diem and motor car hire compares favourably with normal European charges. Included in my recent visit of some 7 weeks to this hitherto somewhat ungetatable portion of the world were about 7 days occupied in coasting from the South-East corner at Djupivogur,



along the Eastern coast where we called at various ports, round the North Eastern corner and along a portion of the Northern coast to Husavik.

My chief impressions of this coastal trip were the forbidding grandeur and the awful desolation of the snow covered mountains, the numerous fjords and their little villages redolent with an all pervading stench of rotting fish used as manure for the wretched patches of meadow grass, and last but not least, the wealth of bird life. To sit on ship deck, glasses and notebook in hand, was a perpetual delight and it was rarely difficult for anyone versed in the subject to have much difficulty in identifying the various species of sea birds which continually flew or swam in the steamer's vicinity. Before we reached the first port Fulmar Petrels (*Fulmarus glacialis*) became common, and in fact numbers were to be seen all the way between Scotland and Iceland. On the near approach to land Kittiwake Gulls (*Rissa tridactyla*) became increasingly prevalent. Two other species of Gull which we frequently saw were the Greater Black Backed (*Larus marinus*) and Glaucous (*Larus hyperboreus*). The Iceland Gull (*L. leucopterus*) — a badly named species as regards its English name for it does not, as far as present known, breed in Iceland — was only represented by specimens in immature plumage. These immature plumaged birds and those of the Glaucous Gull being somewhat of a puzzle to my companion and myself at first — the only apparent difference being as regards size and one is also liable to confuse them with the rare Ivory gull (*Pagophila eburnea*) at a distance. All these three species lack the black tipped primaries common to other species of Gull known to European waters and all the former — in immature plumage — are much alike in their dirty white general appearance. This only leaves size and colour of legs as aids to identification and these are not easy points to observe with a Gull on the wing, at a distance. Lesser black-backed Gulls (*L. fuscus*) were not observed after reaching the neighbourhood of Iceland but we saw a mature Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*) as far north as Seydisfjörður. This species of Gull is not known to breed in Iceland and must be considered a rare bird in mature plumage during the Icelandic summer. Great Skuas (*Catharacta skua*) were seen occasionally at first but were not seen round the northern coast. Their place being taken by the Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) which became increasingly common. Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisica*) were ubiquitous and appeared to outnumber the whole of the Laridae added together and could be seen fishing in big parties all round the sea coast.

The Alcidae were commonly represented by Northern Guillemots, Black Guillemots, Puffins and Razorbills (*Uria aalge*, *Uria grylle*, *Fratercula arctica* et *Alca torda*) while a few Little Auks (*Alle alle*) and Brunnich's Guillemots (*Uria lomvia*) were seen after we got to the N. E. corner of Iceland at Cape Langanes. Anseres of various species we of course saw in plenty but except for the Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), Scaup (*Nyroca marila*), Eider Duck (*Somateria mollissima*) and a party of Pink-footed Geese (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) on a marsh, identification was not always very easy.

Of the limicolae, which we saw in some numbers, perhaps the most interesting was a flock of Knot (*Tringa canutus*) in wonderful red summer plumage, the brilliant colour being an unforgettable sight as the birds wheeled round us in the sunlight when passing our ship. Another wader we identified on the wing was a Sanderling (*Calidris arenaria*) while a few Grey Phalaropes (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) were seen at rest on a small islet in a fresh-water pool, at a northern port. Both these latter species were, like the Knots, in red summer



plumage, and presumably en route for more northern climes for breeding purposes. It is true that *Phalaropus fulicarius* is known to breed in Western Iceland but no competent ornithologist has yet furnished satisfactory proofs of the other two species doing so. It is a case of »suspected« but not »proved«. The remaining species of the limicolae family seen, were mainly Icelandic breeders, viz. beautiful little Red necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*), Northern Dunlins (*Tringa alpina*), Purple Sandpipers (*Tringa maritima*), Northern Golden Plovers (*Charadrius apricarius*), Iceland Redshanks (*T. totanus robustus*), Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), and Faeroe Snipe (*G. gallinago faeroeensis*). We also saw a few Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*), not up till now proved to breed in Iceland, and at a South-eastern port a few Oyster Catchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*). I think my list of birds identified on our voyage is now complete except for Gannet (*Sula bassana*), Cormorant and Shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo* and *graculus*), Iceland Raven (*Corvus corax tibetanus*) and on one occasion a beautiful Iceland Falcon (*Falco rusticolus islandus*). Finally, at Husavik, after we had landed and were strolling along the brink of a sea cliff, we were very much surprised to see a Martin (*Delichon urbica*). Poor little bird, it was badly lost! and we naturally wondered whether it would ever find its way back to more congenial climes where it would have the chance of assisting to rear a family. I find that after writing all this I have managed to leave out three passerine birds. These are the Iceland Redwing (*Turdus musicus coburni*), Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) and White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*). The first was seen in some numbers in some birch and willow scrub at one of our ports of call, the Bunting became increasingly common as we got further and further north and the Wagtail was common everywhere.

On landing at Husavik on 24<sup>th</sup> May it was a great relief to us to be met by the guide we had engaged by letter from England and to be informed by him that it would be possible for us to proceed by automobile to the southern end of the famous Lake Myvatn — where we proposed to have our headquarters for the duration of our stay in Iceland. Never shall I forget that motor car journey on May 25<sup>th</sup>. Our car was a Ford limousine with some of its windows broken. No sooner did we commence our journey at about 2 p. m. than it commenced to snow. At first the road was quite good but it was almost impossible to see out of the windows of our vehicle as the glass, where present, soon became snow covered, while the deficiencies in the windows allowed powdered snow to blow in all over us! We managed, however, to obtain an impression of utter desolation of fantastic larva rocks, and barren tundra with not a sign of a tree excepting a certain amount of dwarf willow and birch and occasional stretches of river or lake where we got glimpses of Ducks of various species. After about 30 Kilos the metalled road became a mere cinder track of terrible ruts, across a snowy waste! It got colder and colder and the snow became heavier and heavier and at times the track disappeared altogether. The final straw was when the wheels of the car refused to grip on a rise and we had to get out in the blinding snow and put our shoulders to the wheels! This happened two or three times and stoppages were also made for our guide to dismount and look for the lost track or else to fill up the car radiator with water — for the cooling water was boiling furiously thanks to many miles on low gear — and this in spite of the great cold. However, every lane has its turning and we eventually arrived about 7 p. m. at a substantial stone built house in close proximity to a little wooden church and group of tin roofed turf and wood



huts, huddled together in a block for warmth and protection. We had arrived at Skutustadir and had taken 3 hours to travel 60 kilos. An unpleasant enough journey, certainly, but how infinitely worse it would have been on pony back — the only method of travel a very few years ago!

Well, our stone built house was the newly built residence of the local pastor and arrangements had previously been made for us to stay with its genial owner. It is the normal procedure, for travellers in Iceland, to stay at any manse or farmhouse where their day's journey happens to end and in our case we were extremely lucky as a comfortable stone built house is an extreme rarity away from coastal ports, and as far as we were concerned a most unexpected luxury. It is true my companion and I had to share a very small bedroom but we had, in addition, a delightful sitting room and last but not least, good food and servants to wait upon us. I have already mentioned an interpreter. This functionary is absolutely necessary for a visitor to Iceland who wishes to go inland, for although the inhabitants are by no means uneducated, it is rare to find one with whom one can converse in any language except Icelandic, or perhaps Danish. It appears that the most usual foreign language studied by Icelanders is English, but where we went, at all events, it was of little use when endeavouring to make oneself understood by the country folk. I wonder how many people there are, who take an interest in birds, who realise that countless thousands of the Anseres that winter in Europe have their breeding homes in Iceland? Well, this is the case and probably Lake Myvatn is the greatest Duck breeding district in Iceland. One might almost call it a »Duck Farm« for the birds are of value to the inhabitants for their eggs as food and they are well looked after and not unduly robbed since the normal procedure is to take 1 or 2 eggs from each nest and leave the remainder to hatch. In addition, they are absurdly tame and nowhere out of a Zoo is it possible to see more Ducks or tamer Ducks than on an Icelandic lake and L. Myvatn in particular. Within 30 metres of our sitting room windows was the edge of great marsh, several square Kilos in extent. In the marsh were various open sheets of water and one of these was within a stone's throw. Can my readers imagine anything more charming for a bird lover than to see numbers of Long-tailed Ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*) and Scaup (*Nyroca marila*), and in lesser numbers, Red breasted Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*), Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), Iceland Mallard (*Anas boschas subboschas*), Tufted Ducks (*Nyroca fuligula*), Teal (*A. crecca*), Pintails (*Anas acuta*) and Scoters (*Oidemia nigra*) courting, squabbling and feeding in full view of one's sitting room window? The Southern shore of L. Myvatn itself, was about 200 metres away on the other side of the house and there one saw all the same species already mentioned and in addition a number of beautiful Barrows Golden Eyes (*Bucephala islandica*), a true native of Iceland, a few Gadwall (*A. strepera*) and an occasional Goosander (*Mergus merganser*). The only other Icelandic inland breeding Duck is the quite remarkable Harlequin (*H. histrionicus*). These were to be seen on a swift river a few kilos distance away from Skutustadir. It was quite wonderful to see these glorious birds floating like feathers in any boiling rapid and able to swim with or against the current with almost equal facility, in the full glory of their remarkable plumage.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous large bird in Iceland is the Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*). In every direction one heard its beautiful bubbling note and their handsome, brown blotched, olive eggs were to be found in the drier



tundra country rather than in the marshy districts. Not an easy nest to find by any means, one could of course find one by chance, but to find by the expedient of watching the birds required much time and patience, since it was rarely that one could successfully hide from their watchful eyes, or be free from the noisy alarm notes of the various suspicious males of adjoining »territories«. Equally wary species are the Northern Golden Plover (*Charadrius apricarius*) and the Iceland Redshank, (*Totanus totanus robustus*) and here again nests were not easy to find. The former either rose from its eggs at a great distance, and if seen to do so the spot was not easy to mark, or else the bird sat so closely that one could pass her unsuspectingly, within a few feet, as she sat motionless on her beautiful eggs in some slight hollow on dry lichen covered ground. The latter, essentially a marsh breeder, with eggs well concealed in some tuft of grass, never by any chance gave away its actual nest site unless one could mark the distinctly indefinite spot from which a bird might rise at a range of at least 100 metres! However, on occasion they nested on small islets in the marsh I have already mentioned and here they were easily enough found by methodically hunting the surfaces of these islets. The Faeroe Snipe (*G. gallinago faeroensis*) was quite common everywhere but curiously enough was rarely to be found nesting on marshy ground (as in Europe). A favourite site was on quite dry ground among dwarf birch and this also applied to the Northern Dunlin (*Tringa a. alpina*) which appeared to be equally at home on wet or dry ground. Of course the most delightful limicoline bird in Iceland is the Red Necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*). I say »of course« advisedly. Anything more charmingly beautiful and dainty it would be hard to conceive. So ridiculously tame that they hardly bother to run, flutter or swim out of one's way and withal so common that one is hardly ever out of sight of some of them — anyway in the Lake Myvatn district. If you really want to see a comical sight in the bird world, place yourself, early in June, beside any small pool of water where Phalaropes are present — one can hardly imagine a pool where they are not present. Now watch a number of females competing for the attention of one very bored looking and apparently utterly indifferent male bird. This, mark you, all within a range of 3 or 4 metres. Don't say you would not enjoy a good laugh at such a curious and unusual sight and feel thankful that, being a mere male human being, you don't have bevy of beautiful damsels fighting madly for your attentions! To show how tame these Phalaropes are, I give the following example: My companion, one day late in June, chased and captured three newly hatched young of this species, — the distracted father meanwhile fluttering around his feet. This parent then came, and actually fed his youngsters as my friend held them in his hand! In case some of my readers do not know of the unusual habits of the Phalarope family I will add here that it is the male bird that is courted, the male bird that sits on and hatches the eggs and attends the young while the females, larger and more brightly coloured than the males, join up with neighbouring females and appear to take not the slightest interest in their eggs or families as the case may be. As one wanders about on marshy ground in the vicinity of sheets of water, Phalaropes continually rise at a few yards range and one has only to walk to the spots to nearly always come across the four beautiful little eggs lying, point inwards, in their neat little hollows and as often as not quite exposed and easy to see.

Iceland can boast few passerine birds and those that breed there can be



almost counted on the fingers of one hand. By far the commonest is the Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) and their nest are to be found chiefly on the sides of grass overgrown peat tummocks and the sides of tracks, worn deep by the passage of countless ponies and other domestic animals. In far northern climes, many passerine birds lay more eggs to a clutch than down south. For example, I found one nest of a *pratensis* containing no less than seven eggs, and another with six. In Britain and further south a normal clutch for this species is three or four, while five is not so common. Another common Icelandic bird is the Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) an inhabitant of the larva rock country. These are charming little birds in their black and white plumage, the cheerful song can be heard on all sides and they are absurdly tame. In early June there is no particular difficulty in finding their nests when they are engaged in building them, and later on every male sits and sings from some rock pinnacle a few yards from his sitting mate. Approach him and drive him away and he will nearly always call his mate who suddenly appears as if from nowhere. Stand or sit quietly, say, 10 metres away, and almost at once she will pop into some hole or fissure, leading to her nest, in the larva rock. This nest is often some distance away from the entrance hole but it is rare that one cannot easily see it owing to its white feather lining which shows up well in semi-darkness; however, in order to be able to see the beautiful red blotched and spotted eggs at close quarters it is necessary, nearly always, to break away larva rock with a hammer or else use a bag on the end of a stick. The Greenland Wheatear (*Oe. oenanthe leucorrhoa*) is another species of the larva rock country. We did not find them particularly common and their nests are by no means easy to find before the period when they are feeding their young then it is easy enough to watch them to some deep hole in a tumbled mass of larva or artificial wall of larva rocks forming the sides of a sheep or cattle pen. A locally common species of the birch and willow scrub covered country — provided the »trees« are a metre or so high, is the Iceland Redpoll (*Acanthis linaria islandica*) and their beautiful little nests are easy to see early in June before there is sufficient leaf to conceal them. The birds are conspicuous enough with their twittering notes made, as they fly with conspicuous undulating flight, high overhead. A distinctly scarce passerine resident is the Iceland Wren (*T. troglodytes islandicus*). We considered ourselves extremely lucky to meet what this subspecies of our common European bird, and we must have discovered the breeding ground of at least 5 pairs. No nest was ever found but we saw two broods of flying young. It would require much time and patience to find a nest by watching the birds as they run about inconspicuously amid the scrub overgrown tumbled masses of larva rock pitted with underground caves. Personally I gave it up as hopeless, since the flies, and the consequent wearing of a veil, made it quite impossible to follow the movements of such minute birds for more than a few brief moments. White Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*) are quite as common as they are anywhere in Europe and their nests are not difficult to find being conspicuously placed, in many cases, on ledges and in shallow holes in caves both above and below ground level. The last of the passerines, that I shall mention, and by no means the least, is that fine bird Iceland Raven, (*Corvus corax tibetanus*). This species is a perfect terror to all of the Duck family and in fact to all those birds whose eggs are in anyway exposed to view. I fear it is a most harmful bird and much hated by the Icelandic farmers. Morning and evening flocks of these great black robbers would pass over our quarters en route to and from



their roosting (and breeding) places in the distant mountains. They would spread all over Lake Myvatn and its surroundings in small parties and systematically hunt for eggs and young birds. On the small islands they would land and hop around finding every nest and every egg and it is a marvel that any egg ever hatched at all. My companion used to amuse himself by shooting these pests during their evening homeward flight and he thereby earned the gratitude of many neighbouring farmers. Birds shot and examined were simply gorged with egg and it actually trickled from their beaks. How much better it would be, so it seems to me, if international congresses, formed for the Protection of Migratory Wildfowl, would concentrate on measures for the destruction of Icelandic Ravens, rather than bother about the comparatively few Ducks and Geese that are destroyed by man, for food, during their migration periods.

Iceland has few accipitres. The White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaëtus albicilla*) does not now breed in the Myvatn district, if it ever did, and is in any case a very rare resident and that reduces one to only two resident species, both common, namely the Iceland falcon (*Falco rusticolus islandus*) and the Merlin (*Falco columbarius aesalon*). The former has its picture on the country's paper currency and also on every post-office, for it is the National emblem. It is now protected throughout the year and the damage it does among the Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus islandorum*) has to be seen to be believed. On our arrival in the country the Ptarmigan had not assumed their summer plumage of brown black and white and were extremely conspicuous in nearly pure white attire, but what were, if possible, even more conspicuous were the little heaps of white feathers to be seen at intervals all over the dwarf birch country, eloquent reminders of the meals of various Iceland falcons. It struck us very forcibly that if the Iceland falcon is not kept in check there will soon be no Ptarmigan. The little falco aesalon is by no means conspicuously common round Myvatn but there were few days that we did not get a glimpse of one. No nest was ever found.

Another bold and destructive species that we found one nest of was the Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). That this pair lived largely on *Phalaropus lobatus* was evidenced by the castings we examined from beside a rock which they used as a resting place. The nest, with the usual two eggs, being only a short distance away on a grassy mound raised slightly above the damp of a surrounding marsh. Three other species of laridae nest in the Myvatn district. The largest is the Greater Black backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) and, as to be expected, this great robber was a deadly enemy of the ducks but fortunately was by no means common. The only other Gull we noted was the Black headed (*Larus ridibundus*). This species was of extreme rarity until quite recently but a small breeding colony of four or five pairs has now established it self and should rapidly increase. Of course the Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisica*) was extremely common and nesting everywhere in marshes. What a bold little birds this is. Many were the attacks they made upon us and I can assure my readers that unless one's head is well covered it is no joke to suddenly receive a dig on the top of one's head from the sharp pointed beak of an extremely angry Tern whose nesting territory one has invaded.

Of the various ducks I do not propose to say any more than I have done already beyond mentioning that their nests are to be found everywhere and in a very short time one becomes quite proficient at recognising parent birds and their feather lined nests and eggs, at a glance. The King of the Anseres was of course the Iceland Whooper Swan (*C. cygnus islandicus*) and these we often



saw — on one occasion no less than 50 were counted on a small lake a good many kilos to the south of Myvatn. It was evident that great numbers must nest on lakes in the uninhabited interior of Iceland, for they certainly do not appear to breed round Myvatn. Of Geese we discovered two species breeding — one the common Grey Lag (*Anser anser*), which we often saw, and two nests of which were found on one of the Myvatn islands. The other species was the Pink-footed (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) and I am happy to be able to say that the colony we discovered, many kilos south of Myvatn and in the central desert, furnished us with indisputable proofs of the breeding of this species in Iceland for the first time. It has for long been suspected but never proved. Needless to say we preserved a bird shot from its nest also eggs and photographs so that this species can now be definitely added to the list of Icelandic breeders.

There now only remain three more species whose nests we discovered, namely the Great Northern Diver (*Colymbus immer*), the Red Throated Diver (*Colymbus stellatus*) and the Slavonian Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*). It would be difficult to imagine more beautiful birds but they are so well known that there is nothing original that I can say about them. The Divers require some looking for and we saw no sign of either species actually nesting on Myvatn itself. The Northern is a denizen of quite isolated lakes and probably becomes commoner as one gets into the interior of the country, while the Red Throated is content with any small pool in a marsh. The Slavonian Grebe we found to be extremely common, conspicuous and thame, there was not the slightest difficulty in discovering their floating nest of rotting vegetation. Grebes in Europe are normally shy and inconspicuous but in Iceland one can watch them courting, nest building and sitting conspicuously on their nests at a range of a few metres without bothering to hide or make a stealthy approach to their nesting territory. Almost every small, rushy sided pool held one or more pairs.

Of breeding sea birds, I have said nothing, for beyond our voyage we spent practically no time on the sea coast. Neither have I mentioned meeting with the nest of Purple Sandpipers (*Tringa maritima*), or of Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*) but this is because we very rarely saw either species in the Myvatn district, where they are scarce and we had not time to go and look for them on the sea coast, or its vicinity, where they are by no means uncommon.

On the whole I do not think that any visitor to Iceland, who wishes to see birds, can improve on the Myvatn district but I have no doubt that they can see much the same birds as we saw with more ease and comfort, as regards travel and accommodation, within reasonable distance of Reykjavik in the South West.

## HÉT HÉTIG IZLAND SZIGETÉN

Írta: CONGREVE W. MAITLAND

**I**ZLAND megközelítése ma nem nehéz. Angliából, Dániából, Norvégiából hazjón könnyen jutunk oda. Az éjjelek a nyári hónapokban világosak, úgyhogy nappal és éjszaka egyaránt folytathatjuk kutatásainkat. A főhely Reykjavik, 25,000 lakosával a turistaság központja, ahol autók bérelhetők. A sziget <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub>ad része

azonban lakatlan. Klímája nem túlságosan hideg. Mi ugyan hideg és nedves júniusra akadtunk, de ez a hónap rendszeren meleg és kellemes. Sokat szenvedtünk a legyektől, melyek beszéd közben még szánkba is repültek; csípésük rendkívül kellemetlen. Az ételmezés jó, csupán a zöld főzelék és gyümölcs hiányzik. A lakosság egyes kivételektől eltekintve barátságos és vendégszerető. A szigeten való tartózkodás és utazás olcsónak mondható. Az ételmezés



és lakás naponként átlag 6 izlandi koronába (kb. 76 pengő) kerül, egy póni ló napi bérele 5 korona. Hétheti ott tartózkodásom idejéből 7 nap azzal telt el, hogy végighajóztam a sziget délkeleti sarkán fekvő Djupivogrból, a keleti part mentén több kikötőt meglátogatva, a sziget északi partján helyet foglaló Husavikig.

Az említett partok körülhajózása alkalmával legelőször nagy, hóborította hegvek tűntek föl, azután fjordok és rothadó hal bűzétől terhes apró falvak. Ezekkel a rothadó halakkal itt a nyomorúságos pázsítfoltokat trágyazzák. De figyelmeztet leginkább a madárvilág gazdagsága ragadta meg. Mielőtt az első kikötőt elérük volna, a jeges vihardár (*Fulmarus glacialis*) gyakori jelenséggé vált. A partok közelében a háromujjú csüllő (*Rissa tridactyla*) uralkodott. Gyakran láttuk még a dolmányos sirályt (*Larus marinus*) és a jeges sirályt (*Larus hyperboreus*). A sarki sirály (*Larus leucopterus*) csak fiatal tollazatú példányokban mutatkozott. Ennek és a jeges sirálynak fiatal tollazatú példányait eleinte nehezen különböztethettük meg, csupán a nagyságbeli különbség szolgált útmutatóul; összetéveszthetők még a ritka hósirállyal (*Pagophila eburnea*) is. A fakó sirályt (*Larus fuscus*) Izland közelében nem figyeltük meg, de láttuk az ezüstös sirályt (*Larus argentatus*) egy öreg példányát Seydisfjodr magasságában. Ez utóbbi nem fészkel Izlandon, azért megfigyelt öreg példányunk ritkaságszámba mehet. A nagy halfarkas (*Catharacta skua*) eleinte itt-ott mutatkozott, de az északi part környékén nem láttuk. Ott a közönséges ékfarkú halfarkas (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) helyettesítette. Mindenütt a partok mentén halászgatott az északi csér (*Sterna paradisea*), száma fölülmulta valamennyi többi sirályét.

Az alkaféléket rendszeren a közönséges lumma (*Uria aalge*), a fekete lumma (*Uria grylle*), a lunda (*Fratercula arctica*) és a közönséges alka (*Alca torda*) képviselte, míg néhány alkabukót (*Alle alle*) és vastagsőrű lummát (*Uria lomvia*)

csupán Izland északkeleti sarkán, a Langanesfok környékén láttunk. Sok kacs és lúd is került szemünk elé, de a jegesréce (*Clangula hyemalis*), hegyi réce *Nyroca marila*, dunnaréce (*Somateria mollissima*) és egy tavon tartózkodó piszecsőrű lúdcsapat (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) kivételével fölismerésük nehéz volt.

A szalonkafélék köréből talán a legérdekesebb egy izlandi partfutócsapat (*Tringa canutus*) volt. Vörös nyári tollazatuk röptükben pompásan csillogott a napfényben. Egy fenyérfutót (*Calidris arenaria*) is fölismertünk röptében, míg néhány laposcsőrű víztaposót (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) egy édesvízi apró szigeten sikerült megpillantanunk, Izland egyik északi kikötőjében. E két utóbbi faj is vörös nyári ruhát viselt, valószínűleg útban voltak északabbra fekvő kötőhelyeik felé. A laposcsőrű víztaposó fészkel ugyan Izland nyugati részén is, de a másik két faj fészkelése még nincsen bebizonyítva. A következő fajok javarésze Izlandon fészkel: a vékonycsőrű víztaposó (*Phalaropus lobatus*), havasi partfutó (*Tringa alpina*), tengeri partfutó (*Tringa maritima*), pettyes lile (*Charadrius apricarius*), izlandi vöröslábú cankó (*Totanus totanus robustus*), kis póling (*Numenius phaeopus*), färői középső sárszalonna (*Gallinago gallinago faeroeensis*). Ezenkívül láttunk még néhány kőforgatót (*Arenaria interpres*) és csigaforgatót (*Haematopus ostralegus*). Még fölemlítjük a szulát (*Sula bassana*), nagy kárókatónát (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), üstökös kárókatónát (*Phalacrocorax graculus*), izlandi hollót (*Corvus corax tibetanus*), továbbá az egy alkalommal megfigyelt gyönyörű izland sólymot (*Falco rusticolus islandus*), nyír- és fűzbokrokban néhány izlandi boros rigót (*Turdus musicus coburni*), észak felé haladva mindinkább szaporodó hószármányt (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) és a mindenütt közönséges barázdabillegetőt (*Motacilla alba*). Azt hiszem, hogy ezzel lezárhatom az útközben megfigyelt madarak jegyzékét.

Május 24-én kikötöttünk Husavikben.



Egy sziklapárkányon nagy meglepetésünkre egy eltévedt molnárfecskét (*Delichon urbica*) pillantottunk meg. Vajjon visszatalál-e megfelelőbb klímájú vidékre, hogy ott családot alapítson? Vezetőnk arról értesített, hogy autón tehetjük meg az utat a híres Myvatn-tó déli partjáig, ahol izlandi tartózkodásunk idejére föl akartuk ütni tanyánkat. Másnap a kora délutáni órákban elindultunk s a behavazott vidéken rossz és fárasztó utazás után estére megérkeztünk Skutustadir-ba.

A helybeli papújonnanépült kőházában szálltunk meg. Nagy segítségünkre volt egy tolmács. Nélküle nem léphettünk volna érintkezésbe az ottani lakókkal.

A Myvatn-tó valószínűleg a legnagyobb récefészkelőhely Izlandban. Szinte »récefarm«-nak nevezhetnők, mert ezeknek a madaraknak a tojásai táplálékul szolgálnak az ottani lakóknak. Nem fosztják ki túlságosan a fészkaljakat, mert rendszeren csak 1—2 tojást vesznek el egy fészekből, a többiből bántatlanul kikelhetnek a fiókák. Ennek következtében az izlandi tavakon s különösen a Myvatn-tavon a récék hihetetlenül szelídek. 30 méter távolságyra terült el lakószobánk ablakától egy nagy mocsár, benne több nyílt víztükrök, közöttük az egyik csak kőhajításnyira. Itt játszadozott, civakodott és kereste élelmét a jeges réce (*Clangula hyemalis*), hegyi réce (*Nyroca marila*) és kisebb számban az örvös bukó (*Mergus serrator*), fütyülő réce (*Anas penelope*), izlandi tőkésréce (*Anas boschas subboschas*), kontyos réce (*Nyroca fuligula*), csörgő réce (*Anas crecca*), nyílfarkú réce (*Anas acuta*) és fekete réce (*Oidemia nigra*). A Myvatn-tó déli partja 200 méternyire feküdt a ház másik oldalán és ott a már említetteken kívül még több gyönyörű, a szigeten valóban bennszülött, izlandi kerce récét (*Bucephala islandica*), néhány kendermagos récét (*Anas strepera*) és egy véletlenül ott tartózkodó nagy bukót (*Mergus merganser*) figyeltünk meg. Az egyetlen másik récét, amely Izlandon fészkel, a galléros récét (*H. histrionicus*), egy sebesfolyású folyóban

néhány kilométernyire Skutustadir-tól pillantottuk meg. A gyönyörű madarak tollként úsztak a föltarajozódó hullámon a víz sodrával egy irányban vagy szemben.

Úgyszólván mindenütt hallottuk a kis póling (*Numenius phaeopus*) fuvolázását, csinos, barnán foltos, olajszerű tojásai inkább a szárazabb tundrában találhatók, mint a mocsaras vidéken. A fészek megkeresése nehéz és nagy türelmet igényel, mert az éber madarat még búvóhelyről is ritkán figyelhetjük meg. Ugyanilyen óvatos madár a pettyes lile (*Charadrius apricarius*) és az izlandi vöröslábú cankó (*Totanus totanus robustus*). A färői közép sárszalonka (*G. gallinago faeroensis*) mindenütt közönséges volt, de sajátos módon ritkán fészkel mocsaras területen. Fészket legtöbbször száraz talajon törpe nyírközötttaláltuk. Ugyanez áll a havasi partfutóra (*Tringa a. alpina*) is, amely úgylátszik nedves és száraz talajon egyformán otthonos. Izland legcsinosabb szalonkaféléje a vékonycsőrű víztaposó (*Phalaropus lobatus*). Annyira szelíd, hogy nehezen szalad, repül vagy úszik el útunkból s amellet oly gyakori, hogy alig találunk olyan helyet bárhol a Myvatn-tavon, ahol elő nem fordulna. Június elején 3—4 méternyi távolságból figyelhetjük meg a hímek figyelmét magukra vonni akaró tojókat. Szelídségükről a következő eset is tanuskodik. Június végén társam 3 fiókat fogott s mialatt kezében tartotta őket, odajött a hím s megetette fiait! A *Phalaropus* családban a hímért folyik a versengés, a hím költi ki a tojásokat s neveli föl a fiatalokat. A nagyobb és csillogóbb tollazatú tojó a szomszédos tojóhoz csatlakozik és semmit sem törődik tojásaival vagy családjával. Mocsaras területen, sík víz közelében járva, itt is — ott is néhány yardnyira, fölkelnek a víztaposók s ezeken a helyeken csaknem mindig megtaláljuk egy apró mélyedésben 4 gyönyörű apró tojásukat.

Izland csak nagyon kevés verébalkatú madárral dicsekedhet, még kisebb a fész-



kelők száma. Leggyakoribb a réti pipis (*Anthus pratensis*). Fészke leggyakrabban füvel benőtt tőzeghalmok oldalában vagy a számtalan póni és más háziállattól mélyen kitaposott ösvények mentén található. Északibb tájakon sok verébalkatú madár fészkealjja több tojásból áll, mint délen. Így a réti pipis egyik fészkeében 7, másikában 6 tojást találtam. Angliában és délebbre a rendes fészkealj 3 vagy 4 tojás, 5 már nem oly gyakori. Izland másik közönséges madara a hósármány (*Plectrophenax nivalis*). Június elején könnyen megtaláljuk fészket valamely sziklarepedésben, mikor építik és később is, mikor a hímek egy szikla tetején énekelnek néhány yardnyira költő párjuktól. A grönlandi hantmadár (*Oe. oenanthe leucorrhoa*) nem nagyon gyakori, fészket rendszeren csak akkor találjuk meg, mikor már fiókák vannak benne. A nyír- és fűzfabozótban helyenként gyakori az izlandi zeszse (*Acanthis linaria islandica*). Az izlandi ökörszem (*T. troglodytes islandicus*) ritka, fészket nem találtuk, csak kirepült fiókáit. A fehér barázda-billegető (*Motacilla alba*) oly közönséges, mint bárhol Európában. Még föl kell említenem az izlandi hollót (*Corvus corax tibetanus*), melyet fészkekrablásai miatt nagyon gyűlölnék az izlandi gazdák. Társam a szomszéd gazdák nagy örömeire többen lelőtt ezek közül a fekete rablók közül, mikor este hazafelé szálltak.

Izlandnak kevés ragadozó madara van. A réti sas (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) jelenleg nem fészkel Myvatn környékén s így csak két fajról szólhatunk, az izlandi vadászsólyomról (*Falco rusticolus islandicus*) és a kis sólyomról (*Falco columbarius aequalis*). Az előbbinek képe rajta van az ottani papírpénzen és minden postahivatalon, mert nemzeti jelvény. Egész éven át tilos rá vadászni, bár pusztítója az izlandi hófajdnak (*Lagopus mutus islandorum*). Magunk is gyakran megtaláltuk a megérkezésünk alkalmával még fehér tollruhájú hófajd maradványait, valamennyi az izlandi vadászsólyom áldozata. A kis sólyom egyáltalában nem

nevezhető közönséges ragadozónak Myvatn környékén, de azért majd minden nap láttuk. Fészket nem találtuk.

Káros az ékfarkú halfarkas (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) is, mely a vékonycsőrű víz-taposónak az ellensége. Fészke a rendes 2 tojással egy füves földszáncra feküdt. 3 más sirályféle fészkel még Myvatn környékén. A legnagyobb a dolmányos sirály (*Larus marinus*), a récefészkeknek nagy fosztogatója. A danka sirály (*Larus ridibundus*) a legújabb időkig igen ritka volt. Jelenleg azonban 4—5 pár fészkel itt. Nagyon gyakori az északi csér (*Sterna paradisea*), mely sokszor intézett támadást fejünk ellen, ha fészkelő területére lépünk.

A különféle récékről már csak annyi a mondanivalóm, hogy fészkeiket mindenütt megtalálhatjuk és nagyon rövid idő alatt olyan gyakorlatra teszünk szert, hogy a szülőket, fészkeiket és tojásaikat nehézség nélkül fölismerjük. Gyakran láttuk az izlandi hattyút (*C. cygnus islandicus*). Egy alkalommal 50 darabot számláltunk össze egy kis tavon, jó néhány kilométernyire Myvatn déli partjától. Nagy számban fészkelhet Izland lakatlan belsejében. A ludak közül két faj fészkelését fedeztük föl. Az egyik a nyári lúd (*Anser anser*), melyet gyakran láttunk és amelynek két fészket találtuk. A másik a piszecsőrű lúd (*Anser brachyrhynchus*), melynek fészkelését Izland szigetén nekünk sikerült végérvényesen bebizonyítanunk. Magunkkal hoztunk egy a fészken elejtett ludat, tojásokat és fényképeket, úgy, hogy ez a faj most végérvényesen fölvehető az Izlandon fészkelő madarak jegyzékébe.

A búvárok közül a jeges búvár (*Colymbus immer*) egészen izolált tavak lakója s valószínűleg gyakoribb a sziget belsejében. A vörösbegyű búvár (*Colymbus stellatus*) megelégszik minden apró tócsával. A füles vöcsök (*Podiceps auritus*) mindenütt nagyon közönséges és szelíd madár.

A tengeri madarak fészkeléséről nem szólhatok, mert a tengerpartot csak utazás-



kor érintettük. Nem említettem továbbá a tengeri partfutó (*Tringa maritima*) és a parti lile (*Charadrius hiaticula*) fészket, mert ritkán figyeltük meg ezeket a madarakat Myvatn környékén.

Nem hiszem, hogy valaki más Myvatn

környékén többet megfigyelhetne, de nem kételkedem abban, hogy szinte ugyanazokat a madarakat, amelyeket mi láttunk, könnyebben és kényelmesebben megfigyelheti Reykjavik-tól nem túl messze délnyugaton.

## A KÓCSAG EZIDEI FÉSZKELŐTELEPEI A FERTŐN

Írta: BREUER GYÖRGY, Sopron-Brennbergbánya

**A** KÓCSAGNAK a Fertőn való előfordulásával már több ornithologus, így Domrowski, Jukovits, Finger, Fourness, Reiser, Fassel, báró Fischer, Tschusi, Csörgey és Schenk foglalkozott, kiknek adataiból megállapítható, hogy régebben a kócsag a Fertő különböző részein költött, az utóbbi, a háborús és háború utáni évekből azonban alig találunk pozitív adatokat a szakirodalomban a kócsagnak a Fertőn való fészkeléséről, sőt utóbbi években, különösen a kócsagvédelemmel kapcsolatban állandóan azt halljuk és olvassuk, hogy hazánk utolsó kócsagtelepe a Kisbalatonon van és állandóan csupán az ottani kócsagtelep védelméről van szó. Mithogy 1912 óta lakom a Fertő közelében és havonként többször is járom a Fertőt, alkalmam volt megállapítani, hogy különösen az utolsó években a Fertő kócsagállománya évről-évre örvendetesen szaporodott, mi arra enged következtetni, hogy a kócsagok ismét fészkelnek a Fertőn, miért is feladatomul tűztem ki a fészkelőtelep felkutatását.

A szerencsétlen békeszerződés a Fertő-tónak négyötöd részét volt szövetségszünknek, Ausztriának ítélte oda, úgyhogy jelenleg csupán a Fertő déli része maradt meg Magyarországnak számára. Kutatásaim a fertői kócsagtelepek után nem szorítkoztak kizárólag e kis magyar részre, hanem kiterjedtek az ú. n. Burgenlandhoz tartozó Apetlon és részben Illmitz községek határaitra is. Utóbbi területet csak a nyílt víz felől jártam be és csupán a déli részeit kutattam át. Ámbár az utóbbi években, különösen a háború után, állandóan és mind nagyobb és nagyobb számban észleltem a nagy kócsagot, fészkelve csupán a legutolsó két évben találtam. Az első és feltűnőbb szaporulatot az 1919. év mutatta, amikor a déli részeken nagy csapat tartózkodott, melynek számát Kotsis tisztartó 80 darabban állapította meg és jelentette annakidején a m. kir. madártani intézetnek. 1921-ben csupán 20, 1922-ben 25, 1923-ban kb. 40 db, 1924-ben kb. 50, 1926-ban kb. 70, 1928-ban csupán a fertőbozi részen 45 és ez évben kb. 70 db-ra volt tehető a Fertő déli részén tartózkodó kócsagok száma. Ezen számok még nem jelentik azt, hogy ezek a kócsagok mind a Fertőn költöttek és az ottani költésből származnak, hanem nagyrészüket kóborlásuk közben kereste fel a Fertőt és tekintélyes részük a kisbalatoni kócsagtelepről látogatott ide. A kócsag, miként a többi gémfélék is, különösen az első évben igen messzire elkóborol és hogy előszeretettel keresik fel a fészkelőtelepeiktől északra fekvő vidékeket, azt az általam múlt évben meggyűrűzött és kézrekerült vörösgémek is bizonyítják. Ezek közül a múlt évben, tehát még elsőéves koruk betöltése előtt kézrekerült 5 db, melyek közül 3 jelölési helyétől, a Fertőtől északra Modor pozsonymegyei, Znaim és Troppau csehországi helységek közelében ejtetett el és csupán 2 darabnak lelőhelye esik a Fertőtől délre, melyek egyike Vas megyében, másika pedig Olaszországban került kézre. Valószínű tehát, hogy a Kisbalaton elsőéves kócsagjai is kóborlásaik közben