

Seabirds in Iceland

By James Gourney

Since 1996 my friend Dan Kerster and I talked about a Puffin hunt to Iceland. Puffin season runs mid March to early May. Along with Puffins you can hunt common Murre, Thick-billed Murre, Black Guillemot and several species of gulls.

We finally made it to Iceland in May this year. At this time of year sunrise is 5am, sunset 10.30pm and temperatures run from 4 to 13 C. We had normal Icelandic weather; rain four of five days with fog three mornings.

The International airport is in Keflavik about an hour ride from Reykjavik. We were met at the airport and taken to our lodging for the next four days; the Icelandic Air Hotel. We each had our own room. The rooms were clean and the restaurant had an excellent menu. After a meal and nap our guide picked us up at 3pm for our first hunt.

We were introduced to our captain and another hunter. The captain explained how the hunt would go and told us how we would shoot out of a 40 foot cabin cruiser.

Day one, the ocean was a little rough. We took turns with one guy in the bow, one gun



starboard and one gun port. They only take parties of two or three hunters.

On this hunt we shot a mixed bag that consisted two greater black back seagulls (they eat baby eider ducks), two Razorbills, four common Murre, thirteen Puffins and thirty three Thick-billed Murre. We were told it was a bad day.

On our second day to ocean was flatter. We were told to be ready for a 1pm pickup. The hunting area was a little south from the prior day. Our bag was not as diverse but with a calmer ocean our bag was up with seven Razorbills, four Common Murre, thirty nine Thick-billed Murre and fifty seven Puffins. We saw several Mink whales during the hunt. Whenever we found a whale there were big concentrations of seabirds.

Our third day was spent in Reykjavik sight seeing and shopping. Our guide, Bjorn, had us over to his house for dinner. He and his wife Alessia served us several traditional Icelandic dishes. We started with two types of caviar; a red and black one. Then we had raw salmon sliced thin with a mustard sauce for dipping and whale blubber soaked in sour milk for several weeks. The blubber was okay. It had a sweet taste.

For the main course they served Puffins and Murre. I liked the Puffin better. The Murre was also good. Other new foods I tried on this trip were, Puffin raw and smoked, fresh Minke whale steak (excellent), horse tenderloin (excellent), smoked lamb, and raw arctic char. I liked smoked Puffins the best.

On our fourth day Bjorn took us sight seeing in the country side. We were unable to go to the Vulcan as it erupted while we were there. The country side is very scenic; several waterfalls, geysiers, a rugged landscape.

We saw Pinkfeet and Greylag geese along with mallards, Eiders (protected for their down), Greater Scaup, Barrows, Goldeneye and Red Breasted Mergansers. There was tons of snipe but the season on them was not open at the time. Other hunting available is for reindeer, Rock Ptarmigan, waterfowl as well as fishing for salmon, arctic chad and cod.

Our last day was spent in Reykjavik shopping for last minute gifts. Iceland may be a long way off but you will hunt things there that you would never see anywhere in the southern hemisphere. We had a great trip!

