

WildWings Trip Report

Spitsbergen 2014

by tour leader **Dick Filby**

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"There are two Polar Bears over there - and they are coming this way"

16 June - day 1

Well, day 1 for most – because two of the group, Pat and Dave were already in Longyearbyen, having flown out two days early.

Meanwhile, the rest of us checked in at Heathrow early afternoon for our SAS flight to Oslo, arriving early evening, where we started the trip list with Nordic Jackdaw before checking into the airport hotel and then meeting in the bar where I gave a briefing. Some enjoyed a drink, followed by a meal, whilst others took advantage of an early night. The hotel was comfortable, convenient and quiet.

17 June - day 2 Oslo to Longyearbyen

After an excellent buffet breakfast we walked back to the Terminal building and checked our luggage for the flight to Longyearbyen via Tromso. On the walk to the terminal Fieldfare and more Nordic Jackdaws were seen.

On arrival in Tromso we had to disembark with all our hand luggage and passports as we were leaving the Schengen zone and thus this was our international border check. We re-embarked – on the same

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plane, same seats, and flew the last leg to Longyearbyen, arriving early afternoon on a calm though cloudy day. We were met by Andrew from the ship's expedition team, who organised our checked bags onto the baggage truck to be delivered to the ship, and directed us towards the bus to town. Meanwhile I set up my Swarovski 70x 'scope in the car park and everyone enjoyed their first male King Eider of the trip, just offshore, along with plenty of Common Eiders, Kittiwakes and Arctic Terns. Once aboard the bus we soon saw our first Reindeer!

I persuaded the bus driver to drop us a little way out the other side of town so we could enjoy the best birding. Soon we were enjoying great views (and photos) of Grey Phalaropes, Purple Sandpipers, nesting Eider, plus a distant drake King Eider out in the estuary, Glaucous Gulls and Arctic Terns, as well as singing Snow Buntings, but alas, no sign of any Ivory Gulls which are sometimes found here. We would have to save up that species for later. The bus taxi I had arranged duly arrived, and a couple of minutes early, so the driver offered to take us on a brief search for more King Eiders, but we could not find them and by now the 5pm boarding deadline was fast approaching so we turned around to head to the jetty and onto our vessel for the voyage, the MV Plancius.

The voyage begins!

17-June-2014 continued: Longyearbyen, Svalbard

Wind: NNW 2

Weather: Cloudy

Air Temperature: +5°C

Sea Condition: Slight

Lat/Long: 078°14.0'N / 015°35.2'E

We had made great use of our time around Longyearbyen! We were greeted onboard and headed down to reception to meet our Hotel Manager, Michael and Assistant Hotel Manager, Thijs. We were then shown to our cabins with the assistance of the fabulous Filipino crew. Our luggage had already been delivered, so it was easy to unpack and make ourselves at home. Once settled in we soon met up with the other two members of our group, David and Pat, who enthused about their two days around Longyearbyen. We were regaled with tales of wonderful King Eiders, Little Auks, Grey Phalaropes, Ivory Gull, Belugas, Reindeer and more, mostly seen in sunshine, which is often in limited supply hereabouts.

A little while after boarding we convened in the lounge on deck five to meet our Expedition Leader, Brent Houston, someone I have known for many years. Brent was enthusiastic, as always, and after a brief introduction gave a toast to our imminent voyage. Michael, our Hotel Manager, then took over the microphone and gave us a general overview of the ship. A short while later the First Officer Tuomo (from Finland) led us through the details of the required SOLAS (Safety Of Life At Sea) Safety and Lifeboat Drill, assisted by the crew and staff.

On hearing the alarm we reconvened for the mandatory safety briefing and abandon ship drill, donning our huge orange life jackets that will keep us safe should the need arise. The drill concluded at the lifeboats, after which we returned to the outer decks to watch us leave the jetty of Longyearbyen with an escort of different seabirds. Prior to dinner we gathered in the lounge once more for champagne and a chance to meet our Captain, Evgeny Levakov, from Murmansk, Russia, and the Expedition staff for our voyage. At 7:30 we sampled the first of many delicious meals onboard, prepared by Chefs Heinz and

Sean and their galley staff. This first evening on board was occupied with more exploration of the ship, adjusting to her movements, and settling into our cabins. In the late hours of the evening we were out into the open waters outside Isfjorden and heading north past Kings Karls Forsland island on our starboard side, towards the ice and snow.

Birds this evening included Atlantic Puffins, Little Auks, Black and Brunnich's Guillemots, Arctic Skuas and a single Great Skua,

18-June-2014 Lilliehöökbrean, Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard

Wind: S 3.

Weather: Cloudy

Air Temperature: +2°C

Sea Condition: Slight

Lat/Long: 079°06.3'N / 011°34.8'E

This morning we awoke to a calm sea and stunning Arctic surroundings. Cloudy at first, we were heading north into Krossfjord where the weather looked brighter. A gorgeous adult Pomarine Skua flew across the bows before breakfast, rewarding those who were looking early. Plenty of Brunnich's Guillemots, Little Auks and Kittiwakes were around, The beautiful views made coming inside for the compulsory briefings somewhat difficult, but once we had learned about Zodiac operations and safety ashore and had picked up our rubber boots, we were back out on deck enjoying the spectacular views of Krossfjord and Lilliehöökfjord.

The blue skies and sunshine made for a wonderful morning and the Lilliehöökbrean tidewater glacier, situated at the end of the fjord, is definitely one of the most spectacular in Svalbard. Its massive face, over 7km long, sweeps around the entire end of the fjord with plenty of birdlife including guillemots, kittiwakes and fulmars.

We left the glacier and made our way towards Kongsfjord, the captain taking us close to a headland enroute where we saw nesting Puffins as well as several Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese.

On the southern edge of Kongsfjord lies the small scientific research settlement of Ny-Ålesund where we would make our afternoon landing. After lunch and a briefing about the settlement from Brent, the Zodiacs were lowered and we took our first Zodiac ride of the trip.

Landing at the pier in Ny-Ålesund, we walked up past the buildings of the science station, past the shop, well, most of us walked past it, whilst those that entered – boots off – had the opportunity to send postcards and pick up souvenirs from almost 79N! We continued past the Airship Mast, used to tether Amundsen and Nobile's Airship the Norge before it set out on its flight across the North Pole in 1926. We carried on around the edge of the settlement on the lookout for birds. Purple Sandpipers were courting by the track, Snow Buntings singing from the rooftops, Ringed Plovers on the exposed tundra, a pair of Red-throated Divers in one of the bays, and a pair of Long-tailed Ducks on a pool. Nearby a Common (Harbour) Seal was hauled out on the rocks, and my 70x Swarovski scope again justified its existence as folks queued up for views. A scope is always a good idea on these trips and we made a fair bit of use of it this afternoon. The Arctic Terns were just starting to lay, some had their nests on the

side of the track, so we ran the gauntlet of their sharp beaks as we passed by, it was quite the drama when they decided we had got too close to their superbly camouflaged nest scrape. A single Ruddy Turnstone was only on show briefly. Arctic Skuas patrolled occasionally, calling their eerie, wailing courtship calls as they displayed. A chill breeze made us grateful for our layers, and it was good to get back into the zodiacs and get back on board. A steaming hot drink and some of Roger the Baker's freshly made banana cake was the perfect welcome! Prior to dinner there was a short recap discussing some of the day's events. Christian spoke about the Airship mast and polar exploration from the air, Rupert discussed Polar bear safety and Brent talked through our plans for the next day.

We also saw three King Eiders today, as well as plenty of Reindeer, and a couple more (unidentified) seals. At the WildWings evening log (in the lounge/bar) I proposed "guess when we might see our first Polar Bear" and I suggested 10:30am tomorrow - knowing full well it could be a day or more before we found one, but I was feeling lucky and we knew there was lots of sea ice due to the satellite imagery that we had received – and the sea-ice is a good place to look for Polar Bears. No-one else offered a guess, so I was bound to win this game – perhaps I should have offered a prize!

19-June-2014 Magdalenefjord, Pack Ice in the North, Svalbard

Wind: NE 2.

Weather: Cloudy

Air Temperature: 0°C

Sea Condition: Calm

Lat/Long: 079°33.5'N / 011°07.2'E

We sailed north overnight and awoke approaching the entrance to Magdalenefjord. The weather was brisk: overcast skies, light snow showers, and a keen, cold wind blowing down from the north. We manoeuvred through a narrow line of pack ice as we approached – an exciting spectacle that had us on our toes looking for wildlife. Once into the fjord we were looking hard for the walrus that are sometimes seen here, and initially no luck. So we turned round and finally spotted a couple in the water. However, they were not wanting to show themselves much, so we carried on northward in search of better viewing opportunities and the sea ice that we knew lay not far away. The scenery around the fjord was dramatic, and we had plenty of opportunity to look at the mountains and glaciers as we sailed in and out.

We therefore headed out into open waters and turned north to find the edge of pack ice which was expected to be only a few miles to the north, off the rugged island of Fuglesangen (bird song island). This spring the ice situation around Svalbard was very different to normal. Areas in the south and east where ice is normally encountered have none, whereas around the north shores the ice has lingered longer than in most recent years, making passage along the north shore impassable. Soon we could see a "lumpy" horizon, white and blue "bumps" soon being rationalised as bands of sea ice. The captain took the helm and we were soon approaching and carefully weaving our way through this new and incredible "landscape". It stretched on forever, at first seeming like it was totally blocking our way, but with a gentle northerly breeze pushing it south, gaps were omnipresent, at least at first, and we saw many Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Little Auks, Brünnich's Guillemots, and best of all, a couple of Ivory Gulls. At about 10.40, just as Bill was starting his talk on whaling (later resumed!) we had our first sighting of a Polar Bear, a male of possibly around twelve years old who had clearly been in a few battles as

evidenced by his scars. The captain eased the ship ever closer and we got good views, especially with bins and scopes.

During the afternoon, in increasing snow and wind, the captain weaving around the pack ice intent on finding more wildlife. We saw several Bearded Seals, as well as many auks and fulmars. Inside, Andrew gave a very informative talk on ice and glaciers – very appropriate in the current location.



Perseverance paid off, and before dinner we sighted another two bears - a male and female bear out on extensive sea-ice, some few miles off the islands, though still at some distance from the ship. However that distance did not matter because they spotted us, and came, almost at a gallop, to inspect the ship. For about 40 minutes we had some of the finest views it is possible to get of Polar Bears as they splashed their way around the ice floes and sea beside us. The smaller female bear was clearly approaching our ship, and the big male was following her and was roaring at this new, very big competitor, called MV Plancius! The views were spectacular.

Then, as though this was not enough, shortly after dinner we encountered six walrus which were hauled out on an ice floe.

Finally, we anchored amongst the islands for the night, in Fair Haven, - a beautiful location with steep, snow-covered islands all around us.

20-June-2014 Pack Ice in the Northwest, Svalbard

Wind: NE 3.

Weather: Cloudy

Air Temperature: +4°C

Sea Condition: Slight

Lat/Long: 079°50.0'N / 010°59.4'E

Another excellent day! We started by cruising into the spectacular sea of ice northwest of Svalbard, savouring the beautiful Arctic panorama. It was an unreal seascape and an amazing way to start the day. Brunnich's Guillemots, Little Auks, all the by-now-familiar wildlife was there, and we were in search of more bears, maybe whales, or perhaps a rarer bird.

Rupert's Polar bear lecture was a highly informative, superbly delivered, intensely interesting lecture. He shared his expert knowledge and extensive experience of this most fascinating iconic arctic animal. This was education at its very best, an exemplary lecture to an enthralled audience eagerly devouring every detail.

Meanwhile, the rest of us were busy looking for wildlife and it wasn't long before we spotted bears! EL Brent announced them and although distant at first, we were to be treated to a fantastic experience yet again..

A warm coloured dot appeared on the ice in the distance, followed by another. Two bears, just like the previous day. As they approached across the unbroken expanse of white, snow-covered sea ice, they were identified as the female and male from the sighting the day before (now 13.5 km from their previous position) and once again strolling along at speed towards the ship.



Digital cameras clicked like machine guns as the young female negotiated the pack ice, leaping gaps and swimming across leads between the flows hotly pursued by her huge battle-scarred male suitor. Wow! Cameras clicked continuously. At times she was within a few metres of the ship, even stretching up to check us out.



Now the bears were so close that even those with normal lenses could focus easily on them. The female investigated the starboard side rearing up to examine portholes and seek a way of climbing the sides of the vessel. The rails were lined with passengers and crew enthralled by this real-time lengthy demonstration of everything presented in Rupert's lecture. How better could it get? Later, at recap, Rupert described the Polar bear behaviour in detail.



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The excitement was not limited to the Polar Bears today. We ended the day with a final tally of ten Walrus as well as more Bearded Seals, some Harp Seals, and several Reindeer and the by-now-usual tally of Glaucous Gulls, Brunnich's and Black Guillemots, Little Auks, and another Ivory Gull too.

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21-June-2014 Summer Solstice. Ytre Norskøya am, Magdalenefjord pm, Svalbard

Wind: SW 2.

Weather: Cloudy, clearing to Sunny

Air Temperature: +6°C

Sea Condition: Slight dropping to Calm

Lat/Long: 079°50.7'N / 011°30.6'E

Having spent the night close to the islands of Amsterdamøya and Fugløya, where we were unlikely to be in the way of drifting ice floes during, we moved the short distance to Ytre Norskøya for a snowshoe hike and zodiac cruise, the latter of which was my suggested choice for wildlife viewing. After dividing the group between longer and shorter hikes and Zodiac cruising, and having got everyone fitted with snowshoes, we set off. A hundred metres from where the snowshoers landed they crossed a large set of Polar bear tracks, which were probably two days old. Although they had lost a little definition, they were clear enough to leave no one in any doubt not only about how big Polar bears are, but that they do frequent the island.

The snow, which was still deep, was somewhat rotten, but the snowshoes made it easy to walk on. As folks climbed the slope, the stunning land and seascape around grew and grew; cold, white slopes plunging down to a cold, calm grey sea punctuated by ice floes that were edging their way between the islands in the ebb and flow typical of pack ice at this time of year. In the centre of this view, the Plancius sat serenely at anchor, the blue of its hull in contrast to the greys, whites and blacks of the landscape. Close to the top of the island, there was a view to the north across a myriad of ice floes that became more and more compressed the further you looked until it became a solid wall along the horizon – the fathomless edge of a monochrome world.

Reaching the cliffs on the northern edge of the narrow island, the hikers continued another kilometre or so to its highest point, which was marked by an elaborate cairn, and to an iron cross a little to the east, which is a memorial to Dutch whalers buried near to our landing site.

Meanwhile the WildWings group were Zodiac cruising, enjoying the spectacular sights and sounds of an idyllic morning amongst hundreds of Little Auks, as well as Brunnich's Guillemots, Common Eiders on the edge of the ice. The Little Auks were fantastic – we drifted on the current towards groups of them on the water, and they allowed very close approach before diving or flying. Overhead they whirred around the scree-slopes, calling loudly and we could appreciate why this was called “bird-song island”. We had a prolonged zodiac ride and chose not to hike at all. It was a great move for those for whom watching wildlife was a major reason for being here!



Brunnich's Guillemots by the zodiac. C Dick Filby

After everyone had been ferried back to the Plancius, a large ice floe drifted between the ship and the shore, pretty much blocking the landing site off. Had that happened ten minutes earlier, the hikers would have had a fair amount of difficulty returning to the ship.

After lunch, the captain again took us into the pack-ice. In addition to the most amazing scenery and the wonder of being out on the frozen ocean, there was plenty of wildlife to enjoy. Highlights, apart from being in the amazing sea ice again, included a single adult Sabine's Gull, a couple of pairs of King Eiders, several more Walrus, and many Bearded Seals, but no more bears. The captain carefully picked a way amongst the pack until we reached the open sea west of Danskøya, on our way south to Magdalenefjord. During the afternoon Christian gave a talk about the explorer Hjalmar Johansen, who was a contemporary of Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen, whilst many of the WildWings group continued to watch the wildlife, not wanting to miss a moment enjoying the Arctic.



By early evening, the weather had cleared to a clear blue sky and almost no wind, perfect for the barbecue on deck, and perfect for enjoying and photographing the fantastic scenery of Magdalenefjord, with Waggonwaybreen a short distance off our stern. The sense of awe at the extraordinary beauty of our surroundings was very evident in people's conversations and the general, almost euphoric atmosphere on the ship. In the perpetual daylight at this latitude, the idea of the summer solstice could seem irrelevant, but many of us stayed up anyway as we sailed south for Kongsfjord, to see the midnight sun still way above the horizon in what further south was the longest day of the year.



22-June-2014 Conwaybreen, Blomstrandhalvøya, Svalbard

Wind: NNW 2.

Weather: Sun/Cloud mixture

Air Temperature: +6°C

Sea Condition: Slight.

Lat/Long: 078°55.6'N / 012°00.3'E

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We awoke with the ship cruising down Kongsfjord heading eastward toward some sunshine at the furthest end of the fjord and Garwardtoppen. Shortly before breakfast I switched sides of the bridge in an attempt to see if there might be any Belugas on our starboard side as I have seen them in this area before.. and there they were again! A quick shout on the WildWings radios, followed by a tannoy announcement and we all enjoyed several views of this arctic whale, albeit a tad distant, before breakfast. A Minke Whale slipped by too. Great start to the day!

After breakfast and a briefing we got into the Zodiacs and cruised out into the wonderful, calm bay in front of the nearby Conwayreen. There was quite a lot of ice in the water with lots of icebergs and bergy bits including hundred of birds around the ice feeding, including a single Ivory Gull and a couple of Long-tailed Skuas. The sound of the ice cracking and popping was much more appreciable from the zodiacs than from the big ship, and the icescape photography was stunning, with dramatic shapes and many vivid shades of blue ice. Closer to the glacier we saw several Bearded Seals resting on the ice allowed us to appreciate their reddish stained heads, gained whilst feeding in iron-ore-rich seabed sediments. We also saw some in the water, diving and swimming around the zodiacs. Great cruise!



Fulmars and Kittiwakes C Dick Filby. Lower: Bearded Seal C Dick Filby

After lunch we sailed a short distance to our next location in Kongsfjord. A group of King Eiders flew by, rewarding those who never give up watching! The Zodiacs were lowered again to begin our afternoon landing at Ny-London. A few of us took the chance for an additional Zodiac cruise, finding plenty of wildlife as well as great scenery and no slogging through the snow! Both, a longer and a shorter hike brought us up in the middle of the higher areas above Ny-London.

Those that took the longer walk headed through some deep, wet snow with fresh tracks from foxes and reindeer. In the drier places they found the first blooming flowers including Purple Saxifrage. A moulting Rock Ptarmigan stopped beside them and followed them for a while. This was a very nice opportunity to take photos of the Ptarmigan. The hikers tried to walk as much as possible on rocks to avoid the wet snow.

An altitude of a couple of hundred metres was attained – about half of the maximum height of the island - before turning back down and westwards towards the beach. On the way down more Reindeer were seen – one male with extremely impressive antlers.

The rest of the group zodiac cruised along the coast, seeing Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Red-throated Divers, and a couple of pairs of Long-tailed Ducks. Once onshore, near the ruins of the former marble mining site at Camp Mansfield, it was all eyes out for Long-tailed Skuas, which did not disappoint with excellent views close to the huts. We had a bit of a wait to see them again after an initial brief sighting, so when one returned there was much relief, and amusement as one (unnamed!) member of the group sank up to his waist in snow, losing his boots in the process, and had to be rescued by yours truly!



Long-tailed Skua at Ny London C Dick Filby

After Dinner, as we sailed out of the fjord and headed south, we were on the lookout for whales, which are well known in these waters. Lucky enough, just after we finished the WildWings evening recap and log, and whilst I was still in the lounge, I spotted a large blow, way off towards the horizon at about the 2.30 position of our course. I dashed from the lounge to the bridge, via the expedition office where I informed Brent of 'large whale', presumably a Fin Whale and continued to the bridge to inform the officer on watch. Brent called the captain and asked for a diversion to go over and take a look. The captain appeared on the bridge and the course was changed.. Several more whales blew – but all were still a long way ahead, mostly to starboard .. Yes, Fin Whales.. but then I got onto a different one in the scope and even though we were still some two miles away, it was obvious to me that it was a Blue Whale! Slow roll of a steely blue back, eventually showing just a tiny dorsal fin... Wow! Scarcely ever seen in these waters! I told Brent and he spoke with the captain: we continued away from Spitsbergen and towards it.. and eventually it gave everyone terrific views. My first ever "North Atlantic" Blue Whale! And a WildWings first for Spitsbergen too! Blue Whale! HURRAH! The ship approached slowly

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and we were treated to multiple marvellous views of the largest animal on earth as it surfaced many times within a few hundred metres. A stunning encounter! Cause to celebrate for sure. Time to log our position: 078°52.7'N / 009°21.1'E Almost incidentally, a few Minke Whale sightings topped off the evening. Afterwards, as we steamed into the small hours, heading south west on a continuing calm sea, there were yet more whales, all of which we identified as Minkes. It was a late night for some of us.

23-June-2014 Poolepynten, Alkhornet, Svalbard

Wind: NNW 2.

Weather: Partly Cloudy

Air Temperature: +6°C

Sea Condition: Slight.

Lat/Long: 078°26.6'N / 011°55.5'E

This morning it was an early start for everyone, but for good reason. We were anchored off Poolepynten, a place where Walrus haulout. Whilst you are never guaranteed to see Walrus at any haulout, as they will head to sea to forage for a few days at a time, today our luck was in. As we approached we could see about 30 lounging on the end of the long beach, with a few more just offshore in the shallows close to the beach.

After landing about 300m down the beach from their haul-out spot, we walked along towards them, keeping very quiet so as not to disturb them and thus hopefully ensure great views. They look quite bizarre as they loll around on top of one another and scratch themselves with their flippers, lifting their heads occasionally to observe their surroundings. They are simply huge, so to observe them from close range, and on the same level, gave us an excellent impression of their true size, which is so often hard to gauge when you see them in the water or out on an ice floe. Even in the cool of the early morning some were quite warm, as evidenced by the bright pink colouration where they run more blood close to the surface as a cooling aid. The mountainous backdrop made for a great vista.



Walrus at Poolepynten C Dick Filby

After the fantastic Walrus viewing it was back on-board for breakfast before we set off towards the afternoon landing site at Alkhornet. Late morning, whilst at sea, we saw another Polar Bear, this one swimming, in the opposite direction to our course. The Captain carefully turned the ship around so as everyone had the chance to see it, but was duly diligent of not approaching too closely – we did not want to scare or tire the bear.

Arriving at Alkahornet before lunch, it wasn't too long before Arctic Fox was spotted – but it was not much of a view, even in the scope. After lunch most of us went ashore for a landing, and some got further views of an Arctic Fox. This site is famous for the seabirds, which nest on the scree slope above the landing site, and are the food source for the foxes in the spring and summer months. Thousands of Kittiwakes filled the air, visually and aurally too, calling loudly and at one point mobbing the fox – too closely for one – which the fox leapt into the air after, and caught! It was also an opportunity for some to try out snowshoes – which proved quite a success. One more tick under the belt! It was nearly all over – but not quite... Back on the ship the eager 'scopers had spotted a mother Polar Bear with two cubs. No sooner were we back on-board than we were sailing up the fjord, making a beeline for a better look. The scopes really came into their own as we stood off some distance and watched the mum and her two cubs devouring the remains of a carcass – quite large – which we postulated could have been a Minke Whale, or maybe a Beluga. Hard to tell when there was not much left of it. Quite a bonus for us, and for the bears too.. good eating in times when there's no seals to catch.

After a great final afternoon in Svalbard it was time to celebrate the voyage with a few words from Brent and a toast from the Captain. Some stayed up to celebrate even more at the bar, while a few others stole a few hours sleep before their very early morning flight!

24-June-2014 Disembarkation in Longyearbyen, Svalbard

Lat/Long: 078°14.0'N / 015°35.2'E

We arrived at Longyearbyen jetty shortly after midnight. Some unfortunate souls were on a 4am flight, so whilst the rest of us slept, they disembarked and headed to the airport. We rose at a much more civilised hour, and after a hearty breakfast we bade farewell to the Plancius, the expedition team and crew and headed into town by coach. We all had been booked on the afternoon flight, so as well as a leisurely breakfast, we had some time to enjoy town and/or some final birding, before heading back to London via Oslo.

According to the ships navigational officer we had travelled some 667 Nautical miles on this voyage. Great thanks are due to the Captain and all his crew, for navigating us safely, enthusiastically showing us the wildlife and for assisting the hotel department in looking after our every need on board. Huge thanks too to the expedition team, so ably led by Brent and Andrew, for enabling our day to day activities, educating us, providing much of the basis for this write-up, and generally being a good bunch! Their flexibility and 100% dedication to ensuring that we all had the best possible time was very much appreciated – well done team!

I can't wait to head back next year and do it all over again with a new group.

Dick Filby/WildWings tour leader

Captain	Evgeny Levakov	Russia
Expedition Leader	Brent Houston	USA
Assistant Expedition Leader	Andrew Bishop	Australia
Guide/Lecturer	Bill Smith	Scotland
Guide/Lecturer	Bob Brown	Great Britain
Guide/Lecturer	Josef Wermelinger	Switzerland
Guide/Lecturer	Rupert Pilkington	Scotland
Guide/Lecturer	Christian Engelke	Germany/Norway
Guide/Lecturer	Erin McFadden	Scotland
Hotel Manager	Michael Thallium	Spain
Assistant Hotel Manager	Thijs de Lint	Netherlands
Head Chef	Heinz Hacker	Austria
Sous Chef	Sean Steele	Canada
Ship's Physician	John Holmes	Great Britain

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