

# ICELAND

## SEA-BIRDS AND OTHER WILDLIFE





In my previous e-book on Iceland, I focused on the varied landscapes of this enchanting island. Now, I turn my attention towards its abundant bird-life.

A great number of birds of different species choose Iceland to breed. Thousands begin arriving in the early spring. Sea birds nesting on cliffs are very prominent during the breeding season, and, in large numbers, they become very noisy when flying and competing for space on the overcrowded cliffs along the ocean's coasts.

In this e-book I will show some interesting locations I visited to photograph the birds; I will also add pictures of other wildlife: whales, dolphins, and the small Arctic fox -- the only land mammal native to Iceland.

Our trip starts in the remote Langanes Peninsula, located in the far north-eastern area of the country. Langanes is roughly 50 km long and shaped like a goose with a very large head. To get there you begin at the Village of Þorshöfn and then drive on carefully along a dirt road; a 4-wheel drive vehicle is recommended.

The weather in Langanes changes rapidly, as the peninsula is surrounded by the ocean and, as such, is highly exposed to potentially strong winds. Fog is also quite common.

In my prior trip, I decided to begin photographing in Langanes. I drove more than 30 km from the village of Þorshöfn inside the peninsula.

My goal was to find a colony of gannets nesting on a rocky column called Stori Karl, meaning old man in Icelandic. I easily found the site and gannets after a demanding drive on a treacherous gravel road.

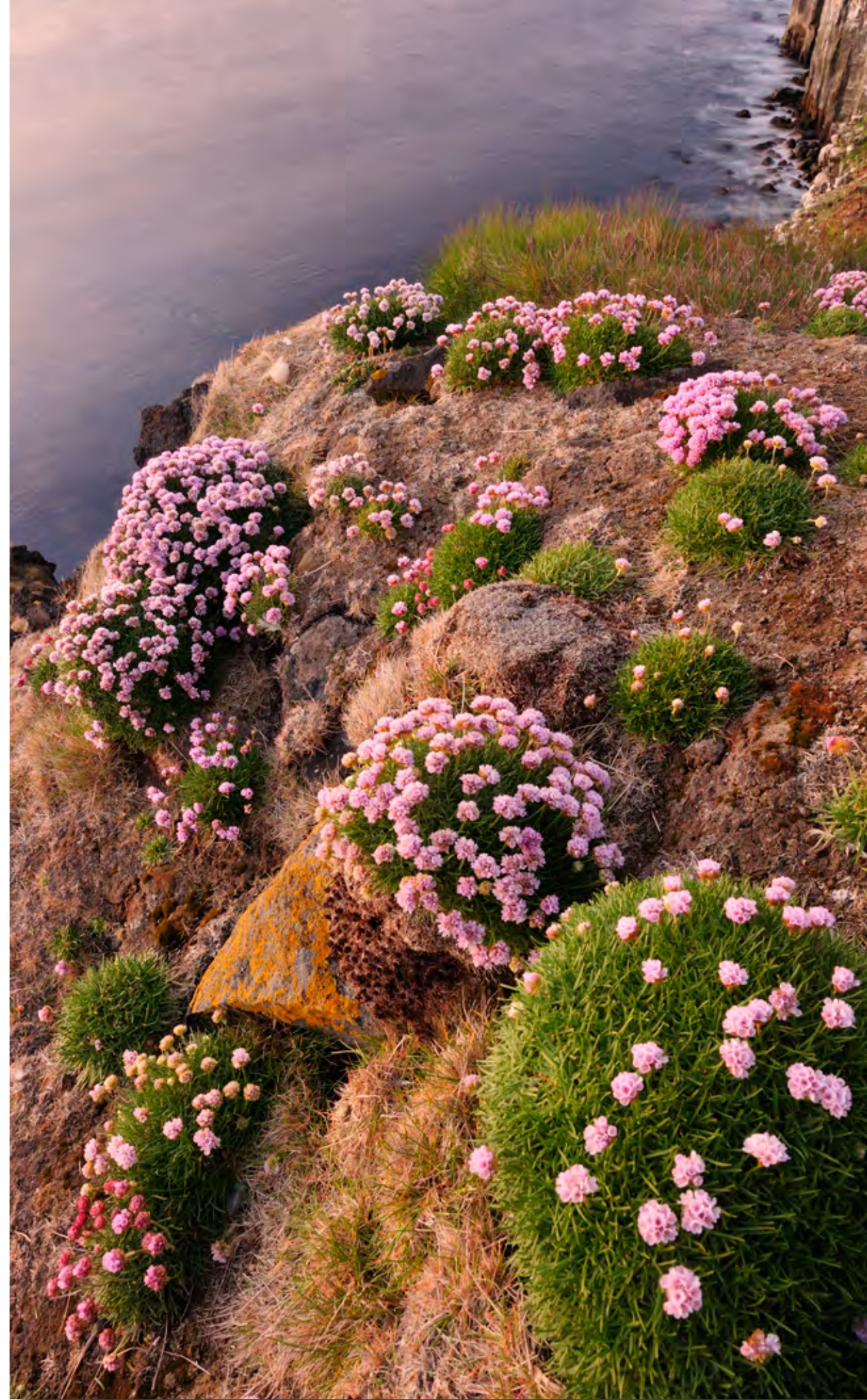
Upon arrival, I soon realized that the characterization as an isolated land was well deserved by Langanes; I met just a few human beings during the couple of weeks I spent there.

There was no disappointment relative to the birds, which were abundant on the sea cliffs.

It was the end of June, the weather was unusually mild, the air still, and the adventure was just beginning.

Sea thrift *Armeria maritima* in bloom on the Langanes steep cliffs

Nikon D3s 24/70 ISO 200 1/15 f16





I photographed the seals primarily during my second trip. In addition to the Jokulsarlon lagoon, I chose other locations in north-western Iceland, including the Snaefellsnes peninsula and the Raudisandur beaches. Pictured on the right is a common seal *Phoca vitulina*, which is smiling at me while resting on a seaweed-covered rock.

During the low tide, the seals approach the beach in search of a suitable rock for resting until the surf begins rising again. When the high tide returns, they vacate the rocks and swim toward the hunting areas.

They are rather tame, but it is necessary to approach them carefully. Otherwise they are easily disturbed and forced to relocate in search of safety. In doing so, they uselessly expend valuable energy.

If your behaviour is right they will accept your presence, providing you with opportunities for interesting photographs of them in relaxed states. A low angle is always important in getting intimate portraits, and the patience to wait for the optimal moment also crucial. These animals can be completely idle for long periods then, suddenly, begin stretching and/or displaying other antics. You must be ready with eyes glued to the viewfinder or you risk to losing the photo capture opportunity entirely. Don't forget to focus on the animal's eyes.

Nikon D3s 600 mm ISO 640 1/800 f 4

