



Narwhals & Polar Bears: Pond Inlet Trip Report Jun 14 - 21, 2023

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An adventure to the northern end of Baffin Island to find Narwhals, Polar Bears, and Bowhead Whales. **Ottawa - Pond Inlet - Floe Edge** Today was a transfer day from Ottawa to Pond Inlet. Things went relatively smoothly (when it comes to arctic travel), with only a couple of hours' delay in Iqaluit. We met one participant in Pond Inlet, spent the night there, and departed to the floe edge the following day after lunch. It took about 2.5 hours to arrive at camp on smooth ice with hardly any cracks.



Iqaluit walk

Floe Edge We had four full days to explore the floe edge between Bylot and Baffin Islands. Our camp was located near a cliff section that was reported to have a Gyrfalcon nesting. The floe edge was about 40 minutes by komatik from camp. Each day was spent cruising around on the ice in the komatiks looking for wildlife and ice features. We did one short but fulfilling hike at Button Point then another while waiting for the camp to be broken down. Some staffing shortages with the local outfitters caused various delays but for the most part we spent ample time at the floe edge and a minimal amount of time holed up at camp.



Pond Inlet



Komatik ride to floe edge

During our four and a half days out there, we did not have any trouble at all finding open water at the floe edge. In fact, conditions were mostly ideal except for some wind, and some rain and snow. On day one out there, a group of up to eight Bowhead Whales showed up and entertained us for a couple of hours. Later in the trip another group (or the same one) showed up and came within metres of our camping chairs perched at the edge. This was probably the best mammal sighting of the trip, but there were others.



Watching for wildlife at the floe edge



Eiders and glacier

Narwhals eluded us for the first two days, casting doubts that, despite the perfect conditions, they were just not in the area. One of the suspicions was that local hunters might have scared them off, but even the hunters provided few reports of the animals. Finally, when patrolling the edge we did see one and our doubts were quickly forgotten. Soon the single narwhal morphed into at least five or six individuals, including a mother and calf. We did not see any tusks but most of us knew better than to discount the opportunities that nature provided and we went back to camp happy that day. We saw another narwhal on the final half day too.



Narwhal mom and baby

One day we parked near some large icebergs lodged in the ice but were more intent on viewing animals than more ice. Luckily, our best spotter in the group was scanning and did see a bear, but at around two kilometres distance. The only other bear we viewed was an unfortunate young male that had been harassing local hunters and it came to an early demise. It's kill or be killed out on the ice and usually the ones with the gun wins.



Iceberg at the floe edge



Looking down on the iceberg and group below

Other sightings included a brief view of a Bearded Seal, the usual Ringed Seals and three Harp Seals. Bird sightings were better than average and included Pomarine Jaeger, Ivory Gull, and Gyrfalcon. The latter was owing to the attentive eyes of our group birder who pointed out a white-phased Gyr perched at the nest site!



Northern Wheatear

Departure The last day included a couple of hours back at the floe edge and a return to camp while the crew dismantled the tents for the season. The trip back was uneventful for the most part. A late

flight the following day allowed us to go birding and check out some Thule (“pre-Inuit”) sod houses. Avian highlights included Horned Lark, American Pipit, Purple Sandpiper and a pair of Common Ringed Plovers.



Common Ringed Plover



Photographing willows

Due to flight scheduling we had to spend a night in balmy Iqaluit which provided some comforts not

found further north, like burger night at a pub. All but one participant continued on to the Walrus and Bowhead tour the following day.



EET group photo