Wild Globe Travel Consultancy
Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.
14 Greenfield Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN21 1JJ, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1323 731865
Mob: +44 (0)7821 640118
Email: jason.woolgar@btinternet.com
Website: www.wildglobetours.com

NORWAY

Date - July 2018

Duration - 17 Days

Destinations
Oslo - Lillehammer - Rondane National Park - Dovre National Park - Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park - Oppdal - Trollstigen - Geiranger - Geirangerfjord - Trondheim - Saltfjellet-Svartisen National Park - Storjord - Junkerdal National Park - Vesteralen - Andenes - Bleik - Lofoten - Austvagoy - Svolvaer - Trollfjord - Gimsoy - Vestvagoy - Tromso - Breivikeidet - Alta - Skaidi - Porsangerfjorden - Lakselv - Stabbursnes - Stabbursnes Nature Reserve - Stabbursdalen National Park - Mageroya - Nordkapp - Vadso - Varangerhalvoya National Park - Ekkeroy Nature Reserve - Vardo - Hamningberg - Kongsfjord - Berlevag - Batsfjord - Syltefjord - Kirkenes - Pasvik Nature Reserve - Ovre Pasvik National Park

Trip Overview

To someone raised on the thrilling deeds of bloodthirsty Vikings and the almighty gods they served, Norway is a captivating destination and her epic landscape, seemingly cast in ice and fire by the giants themselves, is every bit as momentous as the enduring mythology it inspired. Although in barely seventeen days it would be impossible to do justice to such a dramatic land, and we would sadly have to forego many natural wonders to the south, our tour still incorporated some of the most inspiring scenery this side of Asgard and an opportunity to navigate the same timeless fjords that hordes of Viking conquerors had sailed their longships across on their way to invading the isle of my birth more than a thousand years before. Like many young boys I was fascinated by the sheer ferocity of these barbaric Norsemen and if my first noteworthy exposure to their culture was hardly an authentic experience, Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis in the magnificent 1958 film 'The Vikings', over time I came to realise that the truth was even more impressive than the fiction and that these so called savage pagans were not only an extraordinary group of warriors, they were superb seafarers and as intrepid explorers as the world has known. With Tony Curtis supporting the thick Bronx accent he would so memorably recreate opposite Kirk Douglas in 'Spartacus', the movie could have been a complete disaster, but it was shot in stunning

locations, including fjords in both Norway and Croatia, and was incredibly well researched in terms of authentic costumes, the design of the longships and even the breed of horses that Norsemen would ride. 'Spartacus' is the superior film, but 'The Vikings' is rousing stuff nevertheless and the sight of Kirk Douglas running across longship oars and climbing carefully aimed axes to storm a castle, was more than enough to seize the attention of a young lad who escaped the predominantly grey scapes of Thatcher's Britain by immersing himself in heroic tales of blood and myth. Such prodigious warriors needed deities to match their immense deeds and which mere mortals would have refused to follow the gods of war Odin, Thor and Tyr into battle or defied Loki and his monstrous offspring the wolf Fenrir, the Midgard serpent Jormungundr and Hel, goddess of the underworld. As I greedily devoured the Greek myths, initially as translated by the hugely influential Robert Graves, author of the seminal 'I Claudius' novels, so I discovered the equally enthralling Norse legends. Not the generally dire Marvel bastardisations that legions of rather less discerning moviegoers are now so familiar with, but the classic stories of an eternal struggle between gods and giants and of a preordained end of days that was known to all Vikings as Ragnarok. A warrior preparing for battle would have believed that a glorious death was just the beginning and that his body would be borne by beautiful but terrible Valkyries to Valhalla, literally the hall of the slain, where he would spend his everlasting days in ferocious combat and, when all wounds had been healed and the dead again raised, his nights carousing with fellow braves. Whilst every Norseman would have longed for an eternity of fighting, feasting and fornication within the hallowed realm of Valhalla, the Einherjar, as these elite chosen warriors were known, would ultimately serve a greater purpose when Odin would call on them to fight at his side at Ragnarok, when the world would fall. The cataclysmic events of Ragnarok were heralded by a severe and unnaturally prolonged winter that George R.R. Martin must have surely been influenced by as he conceived the fantasy world so skilfully visualised in his 'A Song of Ice and Fire' novels. Wars erupted as Midgard froze and as brother fought brother and fathers slayed sons, so the wolves Skoll and Hati finally caught and swallowed the sun and the moon, foes they had been chasing across the heavens since the dawn of time. Their father, the infamous Fenrir, broke free of the chain with which he had been tricked and bound by the god Tyr, albeit at the cost of his hand, and as he ran amok and devoured all in his path between the land and the sky, the serpent Jormungundr rose from the depths and flooded the earth with its crashing waves. Forests and mountains fell as Yggdrasil, the celestial ash tree that cradles the nine worlds of the Norse universe, shuddered at the destruction and Loki, himself bound to suffer an eternity of pain for the murder of Odin's son Baldur, also escaped his bonds and led the giants in one final climatic battle against the gods of Asgard. The last stand of gods and men takes place at Vigrid, where Odin and his valiant Einherjar are devoured by Fenrir and Thor, with a crushing blow of his fabled hammer Mjollnir, finally defeats his perpetual adversary Jormungundr, only to take nine

steps and die as the serpent's potent venom consumes the god of thunder and the last hope of man. Garm, another wolf of the underworld, slays the one-handed Tyr and Heimdall, tasked with guarding Bifrost, the rainbow bridge that connects the divinity of Asgard and the humanity of Midgard, finally ends the treachery of Loki, but at the cost of his own life, as the world implodes in fire and chaos and sinks into the sea. For some, here the epic tale ends, in the blackness of eternal night and an infinite abyss. However, other versions speak of a new beginning, of a beautiful and rejuvenated earth rising from the sea, where Thor's sons Modi and Magni have survived, as well as a solitary woman, Lif and a single man, Lifthrasir, who will go on to repopulate a fertile new world. Much of what we know of this rich mythology, and indeed Viking life in general, is based on a large number of literary works written in the Old Norse. In addition to the 'sagas', a collection of legends and stories which were often written anonymously with varying degrees of historical accuracy, the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda are the most significant works in terms of our understanding of the subject and heavily influenced such diverse artists as J.R.R.Tolkien, Richard Wagner, Ingmar Bergman and Stan Lee, among many others. Tolkien drew heavily on Norse mythology in his creation of Middle-earth, the setting of his pioneering and oft imitated 'The Hobbit' and 'The Lord of the Rings' novels, and Wagner based his 'Ring of the Nibelung' or 'Ring Cycle' operas on Norse and Germanic literary characters. If many are not familiar with the full work, and at more than fifteen hours long the majority are not, most people will at least recognise the rousing 'Ride of the Valkyries', which was used to such dramatic effect by Francis Ford Coppola in his iconic 1979 Vietnam War movie 'Apocalypse Now'. This famous composition, which is often performed purely as a short instrumental piece, appears in 'The Valkyrie', the second of Wagner's four 'Ring Cycle' dramas. However, it is far from his most famous composition, as literally billions will have heard the 'Bridal Chorus', which appears in one of Wagner's earlier operas 'Lohengrin' and is more traditionally known across the globe as…'Here Comes the Bride'. Religion and death are just two of the

eternal themes that Swedish auteur Ingmar Bergman explores in his 1960 film 'The Virgin Spring', in which both Odin and the supremely talented Max von Sydow make an appearance. Bergman would collaborate on a dozen or so films with von Sydow, perhaps never to greater effect than their 1957 masterpiece 'The Seventh Seal', which so memorably pits von Sydow, a doomed knight returned from the crusades, against death itself in a highly symbolic game of chess that takes place against a backdrop of plague and fear. An art-house sensation at the time and now widely considered to be one of the greatest films ever made, the philosophical issues tackled by Bergman of faith, mortality and the human condition are as relevant today as they were more than sixty years ago when the film was released during the angst of the Cold War, amid a pervasive anxiety of impending nuclear disaster. At around the same time a disillusioned writer by the name of Stan Lee was considering his future at Atlas Comics when their competitor DC Comics released a new title featuring a team of well established superheroes fighting crime together as the Justice League of America. With Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman and The Flash among their number, the publication was an instant

success and Lee, who had already worked on the ‘Captain America Comics’ during the Second World War, was now charged with the task of creating a team of superheroes that would rival the DC version. Lee was revitalised and although there remains some conjecture in terms of how much of the original idea was down to him and the exact role played by the artist Jack Kirby, between them, the Fantastic Four were born and at more or less the same time Marvel Comics, which would go on to generate billions of dollars and several of the most successful movies of all time. In collaboration with a number of gifted illustrators, including Kirby for several years, Lee would create some of the most celebrated superheroes in both comic book and cinematic history, including the X-Men, Spider-Man, the Hulk, Iron Man, Doctor Strange and of course Thor, who made his Marvel debut in 1962 and was fairly closely based on the Norse god of legend. Although I have to admit that I have little interest in comic books and am not a huge fan of many of the films they have spawned in recent years, my son James was only three when Sam Raimi directed the first of his three Spider-Man

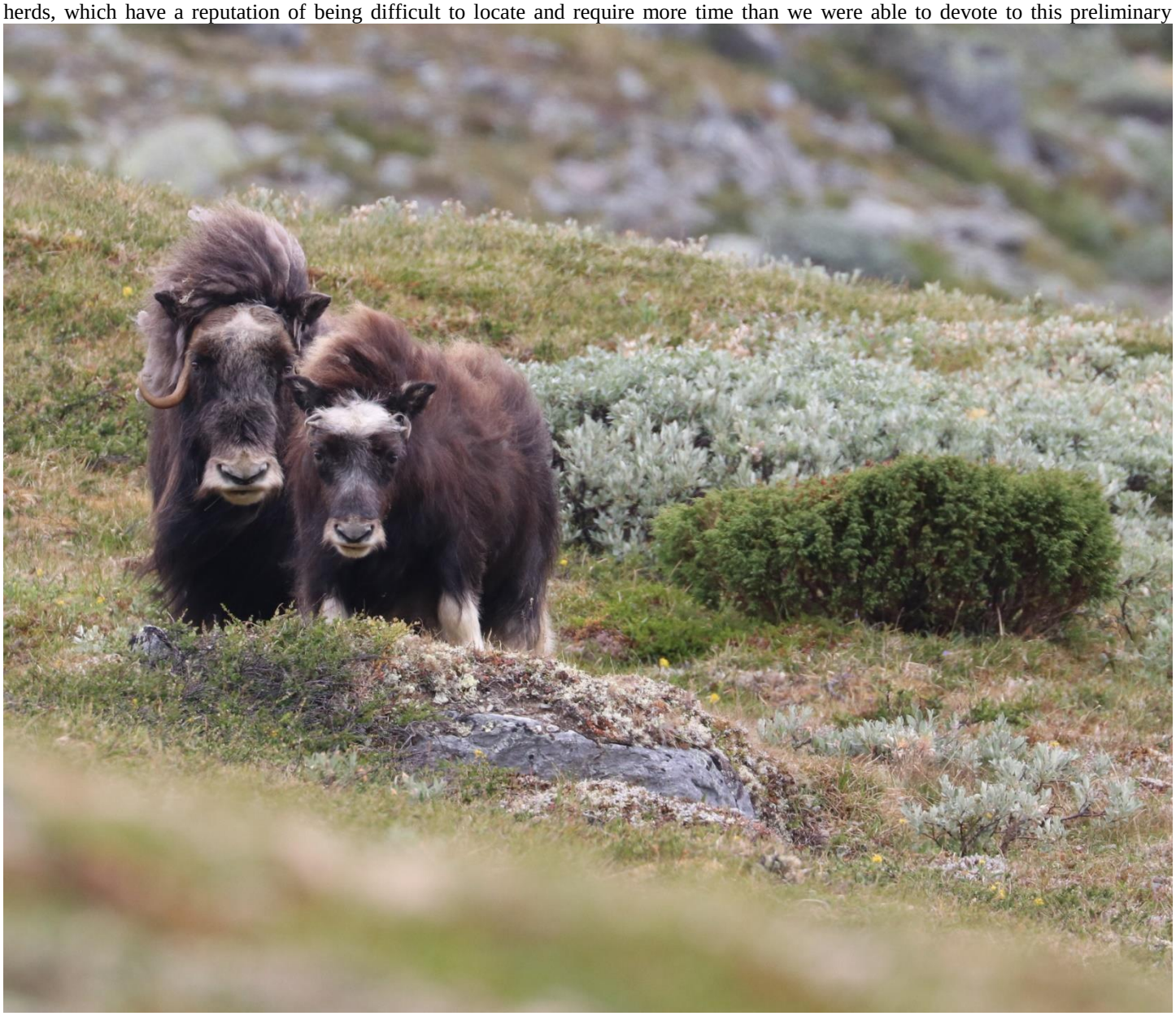
movies with Tobey Maguire playing the eponymous hero and just six when Christopher Nolan directed ‘Batman Begins’ the first instalment of his ‘Dark Knight’ trilogy. Whilst not high art by any means, these were well made and reasonable interpretations of the cartoon characters that I had grown up with and I greatly enjoyed taking James to the cinema to see them. The Dark Knight films in particular had an extraordinary cast, including, across all three instalments, Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Liam Neeson, Gary Oldman, Morgan Freeman, Heath Ledger, Anne Hathaway and Tom Hardy. Having already directed Guy Pearce in the exceedingly clever thriller ‘Memento’, Nolan would go on to make ‘The Prestige’, which also stars Christian Bale and Michael Caine, as well as Hugh Jackman, and is one of my favourite films of recent years. The first cinematic ‘Thor’ offering was not as good as any of these, but it was still superior to some of the drivel that has followed and again had a strong director in no less than Kenneth Branagh and a stellar cast of Chris Hemsworth, as the titular hammer wielding deity, Natalie Portman, Tom Hiddleston and Anthony Hopkins. Since this at best adequate rendition, the quality of the Marvel movies has continued to plummet and now they are simply churning out two or three lazy, formulaic and soulless money-making parodies every year, culminating in the embarrassment that is ‘Thor: Ragnarok’. To maintain our tradition and because of our shared love of the Norse subject matter, James and I took time out of our busy lives to go and see this mindless nonsense and the fact that it ultimately received generally positive reviews and generated over 850 million dollars at the box office, says all you need to know about the current state of the film industry and perhaps civilisation in general. Regardless of the quality, or lack thereof, of some of the individual films, for Stan Lee the last two decades had been an almost unparalleled celebration of a lifetime’s achievements and at the time of his death aged 95 in November 2018, I calculated that there had been exactly 50 authentic Marvel films released since ‘Blade’ heralded a new generation of superhero movies in 1998, the year before James was born. Given the remarkable source material and sheer volume of enthralling stories, it has always surprised me how poorly mythology seems to translate to the big screen and how few even half decent films have ever been made on the subject, at least in terms of British and European folklore. Ray Harryhausen’s ground-breaking interpretations of the Jason and Perseus Greek legends are truly inspired, as are his superb Sinbad films, but the only other outstanding cinematic version of what you could describe as an authentic myth, as opposed to either historical fiction or fantasy, is John Boorman’s 1981 take on the Arthurian legend ‘Excalibur’, despite the rather obvious constraints of a severely limited budget. Nothing has come even close to equalling it and sadly the latest attempt, ‘King Arthur: Legend of the Sword’ by Guy Ritchie, is so mediocre and insipid, it is difficult to accept that the two filmmakers are dealing with the same subject matter. I actually like elements of two of Ritchie’s earlier works, ‘Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels’ and ‘Snatch’, as well as his two Sherlock Holmes films a decade later, but where his London roots and parlances work well in each of these films, he should have been aware that portraying King Arthur as a dodgy geezer with a hooky sword was doomed to failure, not to mention a fair level of embarrassment. As a Londoner myself, I have no objection with the setting or even the accents, but Ritchie fails to do any sort of justice to the source material and instead of treating the subject with even a modicum of

reverence, he chooses to litter his own script with such witless and cringe worthy dialogue, it would sound out of place at a ropey seaside pantomime. For those familiar with the legendary British comedy series ‘Only Fools and Horses’, this is King Arthur meets Del Boy and whereas I was originally delighted to learn that this would be the first of a six-movie Arthurian franchise, I am now simply relieved that this will never come to pass. The film fails on every conceivable level and, praise be to Merlin, it apparently lost $150 million or so as well, which, if nothing else, will certainly guarantee that a sequel remains about as likely as a Best Original Screenplay Academy Award for Ritchie. In relation to the number of accomplished novels and other literary creations, including several superb translations from the Old Norse, there are also very few memorable Viking movies. A handful of films have their moments, from ‘Pathfinder’ and ‘The 13th Warrior’ to ‘Viking’ and ‘Valhalla Rising’, but none could be considered exceptional and even the interesting animated version of ‘Beowulf’ by the ‘Back to the Future’ and ‘Forrest Gump’ director Robert Zemeckis, is ultimately failed by its patchy CGI and at times incoherent storyline. Whilst also far from flawless, the long running television series ‘Vikings’ has probably made the best effort at depicting the authentic daily lives and customs of ordinary Norse men and women and the first four seasons were based on the imagined exploits of Ragnar Lothbrok, who may or may not have actually existed and could well have been a composite of several different Viking conquerors. The series is certainly entertaining and far more restrained than other contemporary shows like ‘Spartacus’ and ‘Game of Thrones’, which makes it more realistic in many ways, but it suffers from a rambling plot and at times feels as if the writer Michael Hirst, who was also responsible for the ‘Tudors’ and the two Elizabeth the 1st films with Cate Blanchett, is making it up as he goes along, without a clear vision or finite story to work towards. No such problem for the English writer Neil Gaiman, who went back to the enduring source material for his retelling of the classic legends in his

evocative 2017 tome ‘Norse Mythology’, which, unlike most of the movies discussed, I can highly recommend. Gaiman makes you feel as if you are trapped in a mead hall during a storm and as the wind and snow rages beyond, a blazing fire flickers and crackles within and a master storyteller invites you to sit out the fury and listen to a tale long forgotten, a tale of gods and monsters and how the world must fall. Contrary to popular belief, the first Viking incursion of the British Isles did not actually occur on the small tidal island of Lindisfarne in 793, as earlier raids had already taken place in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex, where Alfred the Great would memorably lead a last stand of British warriors to victory against the Vikings at the Battle of Ethandun almost a century later. Lindisfarne, however, is the raid that successive generations of British schoolchildren are taught of and that everyone consequently remembers, probably because it was the first to strike at the heart of Christianity and signalled a series of attacks on wealthy monasteries that the Norsemen quickly came to realise were completely undefended. To a rampaging Viking, as well as an awestruck child reading of their exploits a millennium later, it was surely ‘Better to be a wolf of Odin than a lamb of God’ and for more than 250 years the largely Christian Anglo-Saxons and their heathen Nordic counterparts clashed in a series of bloody conflicts that would see much of Britain subjugated under Danelaw and several Vikings ascend to the English throne. Harthacnut, son of Cnut or King Canute as he is more famously known, was the last and when he died in 1042, perhaps poisoned by the last Wessex King Edward the Confessor, so the Norse occupation of Britain drew to a close. The Norwegian King Harald Hardrada attempted to seize back the throne following the death of Edward in 1066, but the usurper was defeated and killed at the Battle of Stamford Bridge by the newly crowned Harold Godwinson, who then had to march his depleted and battle weary troops more than 200 miles south to face the fresh forces of William Duke of Normandy near a small town on the south coast of England called Hastings. As would the momentous events of the Battle of Hastings and the subsequent reign of William the Conqueror, so the Viking Age had changed the very fabric of British society and today around 10% of all citizens of this sceptred isle can trace their ancestry back to the terrifying spectacle of sleek longships slipping silently from the mist. The historical revisionists now offer us a more sanitised version of these pagan marauders, telling us that Vikings have been misrepresented and that the majority were in fact peaceful farmers and traders, as well as being highly skilled craftsmen and unparalleled mariners. Whilst there is little doubt that they were all of those things and much more, at their heart, and before the cold grip of Christianity could take its barren hold, they were fearsome warriors and what they achieved in an age of conquest can be discussed in the same breath as the rise of the Roman Empire and Genghis Khan’s annihilation of the Chinese. I was making the journey in reverse of course and although I was sorely tempted to extract a modicum of belated revenge on behalf of my long forgotten brethren, and maybe desecrate a couple of churches or throw a pretty Scandinavian over my shoulder, I had to reluctantly concede that times have indeed changed and that I would have to content myself with wildlife of a slightly less aggressive nature. Despite a completely unfounded reputation, and unless they are males competing for mates during the rutting season, at which point things can admittedly get a little boisterous, you cannot get much less aggressive than muskox, which like nothing better than to be left alone to graze peacefully and to bask in the warm haze of the region’s long summer days. At times they rest like sleeping dogs with their forelegs outstretched and if you are prepared to spend some time sitting and observing quietly at distance, they will soon accept your presence and allow you to approach. With my son James at my side once again, this was exactly how our encounters unfolded at our first major destination, Dovrefjell Sunndalsfjella National Park, where we enjoyed two idyllic days with these gentle giants, many of which had young. Although the sparse Arctic type habitat at Dovrefjell suits them perfectly, and fossil evidence suggests they were widespread across much of northern Europe prior to the last ice age, muskox are not native to Norway and were introduced to the area in the 1930s, where they flourished until they were all slaughtered for food during the Second World War. The

current herds descend from the animals introduced at the cessation of hostilities and there are thought to be around 250 at Dovrefjell, with a few more scattered across the border in neighbouring Sweden. Several years ago I was informed, reliably I think, that muskoxen have the warmest fur of any animal, which would certainly make sense when you consider the inhospitable region they inhabit and the extreme conditions they endure during an Arctic winter, when temperatures can fall to a barely credible -60°C. Situated further south and not actually within the Arctic Circle, which you cross at Saltfjellet in Norway, life at Dovrefjell is by no means as severe and although the terrain is consequently more varied and can support a greater diversity of flora, the landscape itself has the same austere beauty that anyone who has journeyed to the northern realms of this astonishing planet will be so familiar with.

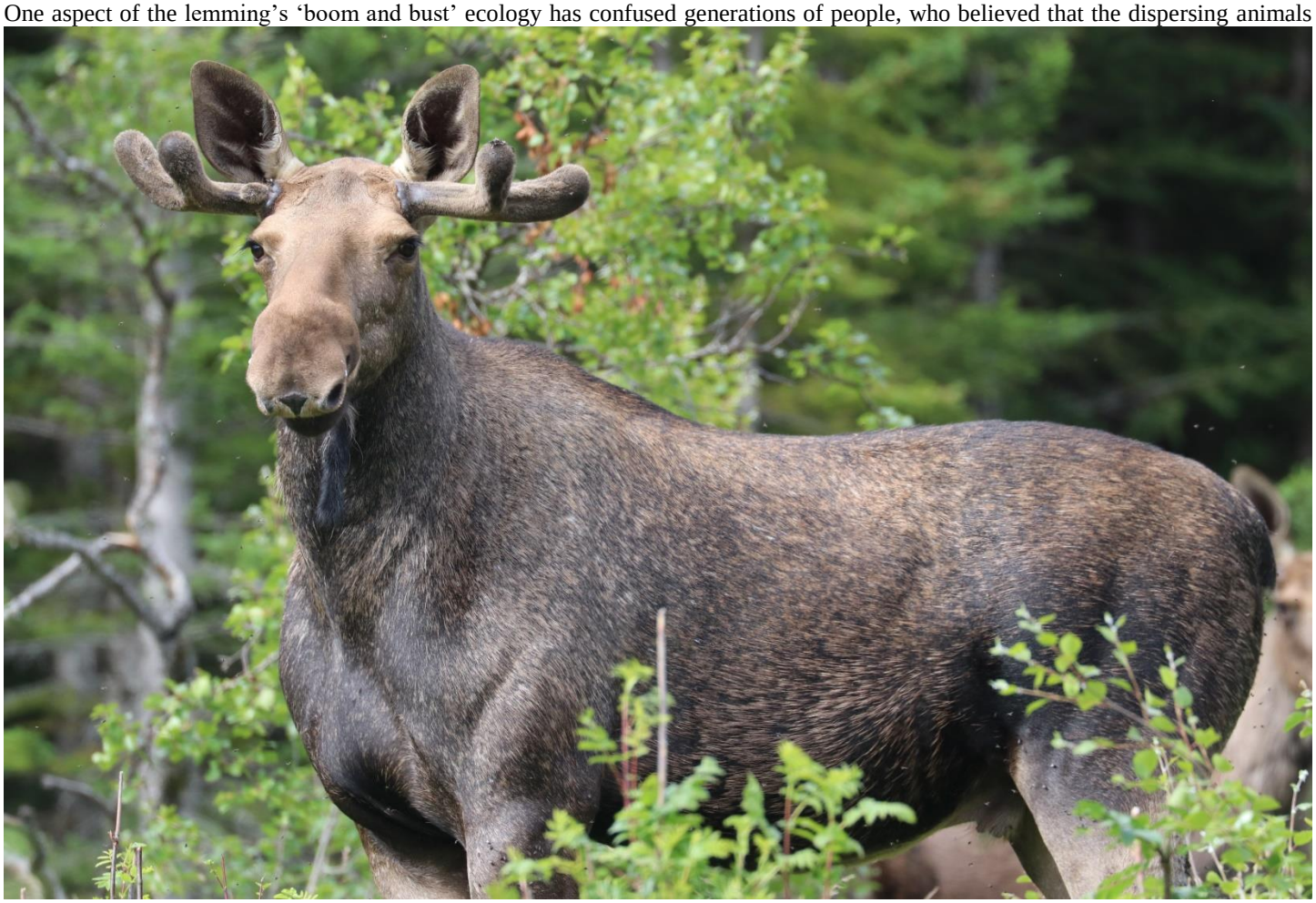
A spellbinding starkness and almost imperceptible radiance pervades the remote reaches of the earth and all the while a deafening quietness smothers the natural desolation, challenging our senses and the way in which we perceive such brutal isolation. The further north you venture, the harsher the environment becomes, but the more enthralling as well and we would spend the majority of the expedition exploring the extreme north within the heart of the Arctic. Even at Dovrefjell much of our time was spent trekking above the tree line with the delightful muskoxen and we would have liked to venture even further and search for the resident wild reindeer herds, which have a reputation of being difficult to locate and require more time than we were able to devote to this preliminary



section of the tour. Instead we concentrated our remaining efforts and two full-day hikes on the relatively slim possibility of spotting an Arctic fox, which have been successfully reintroduced at Dovrefjell and several other sites across Norway, where they had been mercilessly hunted to the point of extinction. At the turn of the century there were thought to be less than 60 adult Arctic foxes remaining in the entire country and they had been officially declared extinct in neighbouring Finland, where none had been observed since 1996. In reality the odds were against us at Dovrefjell, but we had reasonable hopes elsewhere and were destined to spend extended periods searching vast swathes of promising habitat, including all night on several occasions further north, where the sun never sets during the summer months and spotlights are very much surplus to requirements. That we would ultimately fail in our endeavours was probably the most disappointing aspect of the entire tour, at least from a potential sightings perspective, but the only news that really matters is that the captive breeding programme is working and that Arctic fox populations in Norway are slowly beginning to recover. This is also the case across the border in Sweden, where this elegant but delicate canid was almost extirpated in the early 1980s and again only survived as a result of conservation efforts. Although their numbers are thought to be relatively stable elsewhere and a pair were photographed in Finland for the first time in two decades in 2016, it is not known whether they are actually breeding there again and they remain critically endangered in the region. Populations are severely fragmented in the few areas in which they do endure and have never recovered to naturally sustainable levels, partly due to the fact that their breeding success depends on their food source and lemming and vole populations vary hugely from year to year. Known as the ‘boom and bust’ cycle, Arctic foxes will produce large litters when prey is plentiful, but they have far fewer pups when lemming numbers crash and the survival rate for the newborn pups is also significantly lower when food is scarce. This population cycle has always been reasonably predictable, with lemming numbers increasing to unsustainable levels every three to four years at a specific location, at which point, with the local vegetation exhausted, they disperse and the population seemingly collapses overnight. Consequently, you can visit an area teeming with lemmings one year and the following spring it can be almost impossible to find a single animal in exactly the same setting. This has happened to me on numerous occasions with several types of rodent, but all of these species require the right conditions in which to reproduce in this way and it only takes one variation, perhaps an unusually severe winter or an unseasonal thaw, for this natural pattern to be disrupted, with obviously severe consequences for the predators whose lives are inextricably linked

to their tiny prey. That said, and regardless of this entirely natural phenomena, the Arctic fox populations across all of Fennoscandia, which incorporates Norway, Sweden, Finland and parts of north western Russia, have never recovered from the unrestricted hunting that occurred in the first three decades of the 20th century, when the demand for their luxurious coats almost resulted in their total eradication. Thousands were killed and today the fate of these beautiful animals very much remains in the balance in this part of the world. Sadly, particularly for the foxes, but also for our trip, I can personally vouch for the fact that 2018 was not a boom year for lemmings in Norway, at least not in any of the areas that we visited. We did disturb a few highly distinctive Norway lemmings on hikes at Dovrefjell, two of which broke cover just as we settled down to watch another herd of muskox, but generally we had more success with voles, observing four different varieties at multiple locations. Lemmings of course require their own set of ideal environmental factors in order to breed successfully and scientists at the University of Oslo believe that snow conditions hold the key to these cyclic population fluctuations, principally the quality or otherwise of their subnivean habitat, which, in ideal conditions,

provides lemmings with an insulated home in which to feed and breed undisturbed by predators. Their long-term study, supported by a host of credible scientific data, also reveals what the anecdotal evidence has for some time suggested to many of us, that the climatic effects of global warming, in particular the deterioration of suitable snow cover, are already disrupting the breeding patterns of lemmings, which are clearly becoming more erratic and difficult to predict. This will in turn adversely impact the predators that rely on lemmings and other small rodents as a principal food source, including snowy owls, various mustelids and of course the Arctic fox. One aspect of the lemming's 'boom and bust' ecology has confused generations of people, who believed that the dispersing animals



were flocking towards some sort of mass suicide event and were destined to throw themselves off the nearest cliff. We actually have Walt Disney to thank for, if not perhaps the actual creation of this enduring myth, then certainly its popularisation, which was a widely accepted biological fact when I was young and was even taught at school. The legend of thousands of small furry rodents plunging to their collective doom became so ingrained in popular culture that a lemmings computer game was produced in the 1980s, which was so successful it spawned a number of sequels, including a 3D version in 1995. The basic gameplay involved leading groups of pixelated lemmings to safety across hazardous terrain and amid a series of deadly obstacles, which were generally avoided by assigning particular skills to specific lemmings, that would otherwise just march in a straight line to their inevitable death. The game pretty much mimicked the general conception regarding these ill-fated rodents, which dates back to the 'White Wilderness' documentary that Disney released in 1958 as part of its 'True-Life Adventures' series. An exciting and ground breaking Arctic adventure, 'White Wilderness' would go on to win the 1959 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and one section shows the extraordinary and apparently entirely natural behaviour of hundreds of lemmings pouring towards some ominous looking cliffs before plummeting over the edge towards the freezing depths of the Arctic Ocean. As the narrator goes on to explain, the lemmings are not intentionally committing suicide and that the enrapt viewer is instead bearing witness to a remarkable migration event, during which the poor befuddled lemmings have simply mistaken the ocean for a small body of water that they believe they can cross. I have to admit that at a casual first glance, the images are undoubtedly compelling and clearly support an entirely plausible natural spectacle, as lemmings are good swimmers and can certainly negotiate rivers and lakes if necessary. There is only one real problem with what appears to be a spectacular and unique piece of wildlife filmmaking, none of it, and I do mean none of it, is real. For a start, the dramatic footage was captured not in the Arctic, but in Alberta, a landlocked province in Canada with no immediate access to the sea. Apparently Bow River was used for the climactic water scenes and the brown lemmings that were featured do not even occur in Alberta. They were instead imported from Manitoba, where Inuit children were paid $1 for every unfortunate animal caught. Whilst it was made to appear as if perhaps thousands of lemmings were streaming across the tundra towards their inexorable fate, in reality there were far fewer and a turntable and a few editing tricks were used to give the impression of far greater numbers. Finally and most disturbingly of all, the lemmings were physically driven into the water by the filmmakers. None of this is conjecture on my part, as all of these facts were admitted years later, and if you watch the relevant scenes carefully, you can clearly see that several animals attempt to turn back to safety. Their pitiful efforts to escape are obviously barred from behind the camera and they too are forced to throw themselves into the water, where it appears the lemmings were compelled to remain until they drowned in order to capture the final death scenes. Although numerous wildlife filmmakers have recreated or staged so called natural experiences, either to save time and money or because it can be so difficult to predict when or where a rare event is likely to occur, Disney went a stage further and actually invented an ecological phenomenon that was not based on any known or previously recorded behaviour. An apparently innocent and old fashioned documentary takes on a far more sinister aspect as soon as you realise that the cute little animals involved are not committing suicide at all, they are actually being murdered, purely in the name of entertainment. It is ironic really, when you consider Walt Disney's association with another rodent, a mouse called Mickey. Although we dedicated much of our stay at

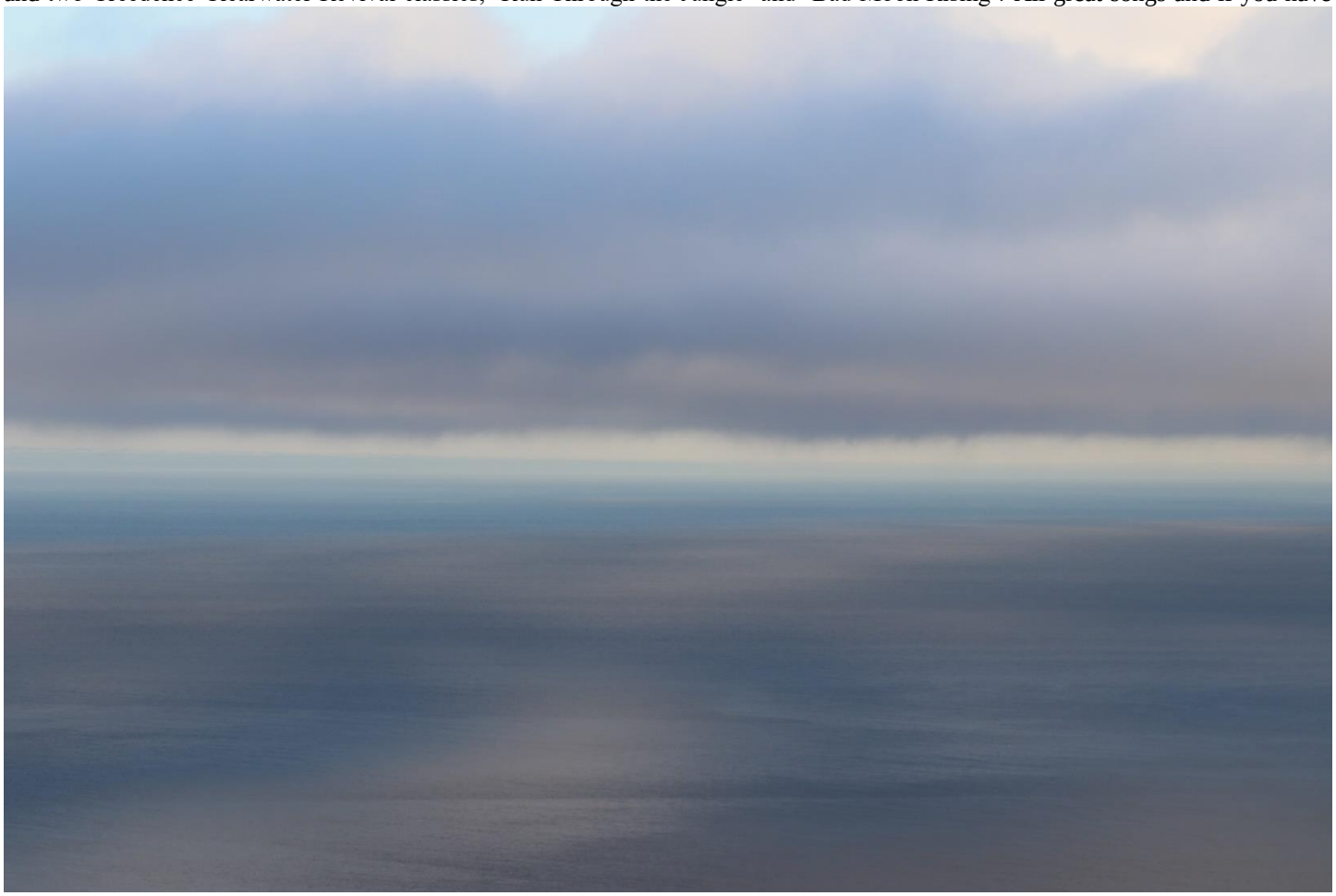
Dovrefjell to the elusive Arctic fox and the thankfully far more accommodating muskox, we did spend some time exploring the pretty birch and spruce forests at lower elevations, where we were delighted to encounter several impressive bull moose and a few almost equally imposing cows, a lot of which had young. Most of the calves were yearlings, but there were a couple of tiny animals that had clearly been born that summer and that we consequently made no attempt to get any closer to. This was also the case with two ludicrously endearing red fox kits that were almost as curious as they were nervous and kept approaching before losing their nerve and disappearing back to the safety of the forest. We never did see either of their parents, but we were able to savour some great views of these iconic predators throughout the tour and although so many people continue to mistreat these exceptionally resilient creatures, I never tire of spending time with the most successful and widespread carnivores on the planet. Red deer also have a fairly extensive range, at least in Europe now that the elk or wapiti has been assessed as a separate species, but this range is restricted by the harsh conditions in Norway and does not extend a great deal beyond the Arctic Circle. We saw the majority of our red deer around the edge of the forest at Dovrefjell and none any further north than Trondheim. Wolverine were another distinct possibility and although Dovrefjell was probably not the best area to search for a Eurasian lynx, they do occur in the region in low densities. The Lofoten Islands aside, they actually occur across most of the country and each and every new day would provide me with yet another opportunity to finally gaze upon the one major cat species that has eluded me for the best part of three decades. There are other animals that I have not seen of course, but these are mainly extremely rare creatures that, in most cases at least, I have not spent a great deal of time searching for. Conversely, I have hoped to see the European variety of lynx for as long as I can remember and have almost certainly devoted more time, effort and indescribable misery to this one furtive feline, than any other animal. Each promising new horizon, and I have scanned literally thousands with initially hope and more lately despair, has produced another false dawn and I have estimated that I have probably spent about three years in 30 or so countries where this aberration is supposed to exist. Norway would be just the first of three opportunities in the summer of 2018, as tours to Finland and Poland would follow, and I left Dovrefjell content in the knowledge that there were more likely chances ahead and that surely it was only a question of time…As I have already touched upon, as much as the wildlife, the austere and crushingly beautiful landscape is a feature of any Arctic odyssey and although I have very little time to read on these intense research trips, if you are travelling at a more leisurely pace, it can be rewarding to immerse yourself in a book that somehow compliments the setting or at least the mood or atmosphere of your journey. There are obviously multiple options for more or less every possible destination, Joseph Conrad's novella 'Heart of Darkness' whilst voyaging up the Congo is one of the more traditional examples, and I am not really talking about your average holiday reading list, but more something that resonates with your surroundings and enhances your experience as you actually travel. Two novels by the Swedish author Cecilia Ekback perfectly convey this poetic union between mind and place and either would be an ideal read on a journey into the frozen places of the world, particularly one made with sufficient time to begin to understand and savour the duplicitous harmony

between the elements and the earth. Both works feature the same small settlement on the fictitious Blackasen mountain in Swedish Lapland, but their dark secrets are separated by more than a century, with the events of ‘Wolf Winter’ taking place in 1717 and ‘In the Month of the Midnight Sun’ opening in 1856. These are two exquisitely crafted books and Ekback’s masterly bleak prose demonstrates an economy of language perfectly suited to the austere surroundings she so evocatively conjures. The actual plots, although well conceived and entirely credible, almost become the backdrop to each story and the scenery is instead allowed, or perhaps demands, to take centre stage. The imagery is as vivid and as primitive as the mystical landscape it evokes and for all the perceived humanity, there is a sense of smallness and insignificance, as if the lives of these people have been lost in time and we are

simply catching echoes of them, tiny scratches on the surface of a world in which they have been long since forgotten. This is the fate of mankind of course, as we are neither designed nor destined to endure and it is almost impossible to traverse such immense and timeless wilderness without experiencing these emotions. As much as they evoke this ephemeral existence, Ekback's haunting novels reconnect us to an intimate and often claustrophobic land for all its vastness, the mood of which can change as a cloud crosses the sun or a reader turns a page. Our own foray into Lapland was still to come, but before we could venture further north, I had arranged a brief detour west to visit the stunning Geirangerfjord, the first fjord of the tour and one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country. On the way we would traverse another, the famous Trollstigen mountain road, a narrow serpentine road with several hairpin

bends offering contrasting perspectives of the impressive Stigfossen Waterfall and the surrounding mountains. Transplanted elsewhere and this stretch of road could easily be described as a great scenic drive and indeed, the views as you ascend and from the summit are undoubtedly breathtaking. However, so many of the drives and hikes in Norway are jaw-droppingly spectacular, that by the end of the trip I doubt that Trollstigen would even register in a list of my favourite panoramas. When you then reflect that we were unable to incorporate so many scenic wonders to the south, including Hardangerfjord, Sognefjord and Naeroyfjord, the Jotunheimen and Jostedalsbreen national parks and the renowned Pulpit Rock at Stavanger, it is easy to see why Norway is considered to have one of the most extraordinary landscapes on the planet. I have heard Trollstigen translated as both troll's ladder and troll's path, but whichever version you accept, they each refer to a rich tradition of mythology and folktales involving trolls, which date back to the early Norse and are often depicted as ugly and stupid creatures. Even in England I grew up with these tales, 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' was a particular favourite, and I remember being astonished when I first read 'The Hobbit' and how the three hungry trolls were tricked by Gandalf and turned to stone as they squabbled and the sun rose to seal their fate. Legend states that the mountains around Trollstigen are also colossal trolls that tarried too long and misjudged the dawn and in truth, I was usually sorry that these essentially gullible beasts always lost and were so easily and so often outwitted. It did not take long growing up to realise that animals, mythical or otherwise, did not fare well around people and I will never forget desperately wanting the Belstone Fox to survive in the British film of the same name or how appalled I was at the indiscriminate slaughter of dinosaurs in 'The Land That Time Forgot'. As much as I loved all of the classic Ray Harryhausen movies, I was heartbroken when the dragon was needlessly killed with a gigantic crossbow bolt after bravely defeating a cyclops in the 'The 7th Voyage of Sinbad' and I endured three different

but similarly traumatic versions of the colossal gorilla King Kong plummeting to his death after being riddled with bullets on the Empire State Building twice and the World Trade Center once. It wasn't actually beauty that killed the beast, it was greed and more than four decades after I had sat both mesmerised and horrified by the original 1933 movie, superbly crafted by the stop-motion animation pioneer Willis O'Brien, Kong and I finally had our revenge. 'Kong: Skull Island' was released in 2017 and, if it is difficult to convey just how thrilled I was to see my childhood hero back on his island, it is nigh on impossible to explain the immense relief experienced when, instead of being gunned down yet again, Kong begins swatting helicopters out of the sky as if they were infuriating insects. Admittedly it is not the greatest film of all time or even of that year, but it is visually sumptuous and unquestionably one of the best monster movies ever made. The extremely strong cast, Samuel L.Jackson, Tom Hiddleston and John Goodman, is perfectly complimented by an inspired soundtrack featuring, among others 'Paranoid' by Black Sabbath, 'White Rabbit' by Jefferson Airplane and two Creedence Clearwater Revival classics, 'Run Through the Jungle' and 'Bad Moon Rising'. All great songs and if you have



not heard 'White Rabbit' for a few years, it is probably worth downloading, just to remind yourself what an amazing voice Grace Slick had. Clearly styled on the legendary Vietnam movie 'Apocalypse Now', much of the cinematography is as good as you will see across any genre, particularly in terms of the flying sequences and some shots of Kong against an inferno of a sunset, but monster films do not win many awards and Skull Island only received an Academy Award nomination in the Best Visual Affects category, ultimately losing out to 'Blade Runner 2049'. No matter, as the filmmakers did their subject matter proud and the audience leaves Skull Island with King Kong unharmed and master of all he surveys, just as it should be. With the rather obvious exception of the documentary styled 'Trollhunter', which did not entirely work but had some nice touches, trolls are often now portrayed in a more sympathetic manner and recent animated renditions include the 2013 Walt Disney film 'Frozen' and the 2016 DreamWorks production 'Trolls', which was based on the hugely popular plastic troll dolls with mad, shockingly bright hair. Many children have grown up with these cute varieties of trolls, but there were far fewer lovable versions when I was young and my favourite depictions were the charming illustrations that appeared in some of the fairytales I read and apparently date back to the Swedish publication 'Among Gnomes and Trolls'. I am not sure if I was even aware of his name at the time, but many of the finest early works were painted in watercolour by the Swedish artist John Bauer, who would tragically die with his wife and three-year-old son when the steamer they were travelling on capsized in bad weather on Lake Vattern. Although they obviously largely exist in works of fantasy and folklore, trolls appear across a variety of literary platforms and even feature in a play by the illustrious Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Peer Gynt was the last play that Ibsen would create in verse, perhaps as a result of the criticism it received, and was very loosely based on the traditional fairytale Per Gynt. Published in 1867, it was first performed in 1876 at Christiania, now Oslo, and the composer and pianist Edvard Grieg, a compatriot of Ibsen's, wrote the accompanying score at the personal request of the author. Although well received, Grieg was not initially satisfied with his contribution and would later adapt the original compositions as the Peer Gynt Suite, two arrangements of four movements, the first of which includes probably Grieg's most famous piece, 'In the Hall of the Mountain King', as well as 'Morning Mood' and 'The Death of Ase', both of which appeared in the 1973 science fiction classic 'Soylent Green'. 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' has been used to memorable effect in films as diverse as 'The Birth of a Nation' by D.W.Griffiths and Fritz Lang's superb psychological thriller 'M', the disturbing story of a child murderer staring Peter Lorre. The killer, Hans Beckert, is actually detected by his use of this highly familiar piece, which he whistles whenever he is about to abduct a child. Having heard the distinctive tune when a previous victim went missing, a blind street vendor recognises Beckert whistling the same melody and alerts a friend to the identity of the killer. Other uses have thankfully been less distressing and Grieg's masterpiece has no doubt become one of those iconic pieces of classical music that pervades the consciousness of generations as a result of its multiple use in popular culture, regardless of whether people even register its title or who it was composed by. Not only

does it appear in the original ‘Sonic the Hedgehog’ video game, but the British theme park Alton Towers use it in their commercials and fans of thrilling rollercoaster rides will automatically identify as the score builds and builds towards its euphoric crescendo. ‘Morning Mood’ is by no means as well-known, but to me it is more significant, as it forms part of one of the most beautiful and emotional moments in cinematic history, the Edward G.Robinson euthanasia scene in ‘Soylent Green’. It is actually fairly tough to describe just how powerful this scene is, as Robinson’s character Sol Roth, having discovered a terrible truth about the world, chooses to end his own life in a special clinic and is disturbed towards the end of the process by his significantly younger friend Frank Thorn, a tough and largely unsympathetic New York detective played by Charlton Heston. A nightmarish vision of a dystopian future, ‘Soylent Green’ is set in an ugly world of intense poverty and rampant overpopulation, where the earth’s bountiful resources have finally been exhausted and the planet is clearly suffering the advanced effects of global warming. As such, Thorn has only ever known a desolate industrialised world of misery, despair and crime, with no green spaces or surviving wildlife. He can therefore barely

comprehend the overwhelming scenes that appear on large screens as part of Sol’s death ceremony, scenes of natural wonder from a healthy and fertile planet, accompanied by sublime classical music. Heston’s character is overcome with emotion, not only because his friend and mentor is dying, but because he has glimpsed how staggeringly beautiful the earth once was. The entire episode is deeply moving, but only tells part of the story, as Robinson had terminal cancer at the time and his memorable death scene in ‘Soylent Green’ was the last he would ever film. Charlton Heston was not fully aware of the situation, although it was known that Robinson was unwell, and as he watched his friend die on set, he was also watching him die in real life. Poignant does not even come close and less than two weeks after the film had been completed, Heston delivered the eulogy at Robinson’s funeral. In all, four pieces of music were used to send Sol to his own Valhalla, the two Greig compositions already mentioned from Peer Gynt, as well as Symphony No.6 ‘Pathetique’ by Tchaikovsky and Beethoven’s Symphony No.6 ‘Pastoral’, which is the music you hear as the screens open and the full spectacle of this extraordinary earth is unleashed on the senses. Released in April 1973, ‘Soylent Green’ was set in 2022 and having witnessed much of the environmental devastation wreaked in the intervening period, it is hard to escape the conclusion that it was not really science fiction at all, it was just a few years ahead of its time. Just as they clearly still do in Norwegian culture, trolls played a significant part in our tour, as we observed numerous models and sculptures over the course of our long journey, the vast majority of which featured a characteristically bulbous nose. We stopped to admire several of the more artistic and creative efforts, including a few skilfully carved in wood, and the only real disappointment was that we were never to encounter a live one, but mammals remained our priority and we more had to concentrate on searching for them. After the detour and an enjoyable cruise at Geirangerfjord, we began travelling north in earnest and some seriously long driving days were extended further by the number of ferries that it was necessary to catch whilst journeying along the coast. They were well worth it though, as every drive was a scenic adventure in its own right and the ferry crossings themselves were as picturesque as any of the formal boat tours we would experience. Having overnighted at Trondheim, within a few miles of our last red deer sighting, we pushed on to the remarkable landscapes of Saltfjellet-Svartisen National Park, where we officially crossed into the Arctic. We would sadly not have sufficient time to visit the Svartisen glaciers, but Saltfjellet did provide us with another opportunity to search for Arctic fox and we accordingly based ourselves at nearby Storjord, which would also enable us to hike in the adjoining Junkerdal National Park. We had nowhere near as much time as I would have liked in what is an outstanding area, but you could say that at almost every destination on this type of relatively brief tour and at least we were now able to rely on more or less permanent daylight and to consequently spend a great deal of time in the field. That our long hikes were largely rewarded with pristine alpine lakes, cascading waterfalls and epic vistas, would perhaps have been disappointing, had we not been prepared for such an eventuality, as you have to listen to your own advice at times and cannot expect to encounter a wide variety of animals if you are only prepared to devote a day or two to an area, particularly an area as vast and inaccessible as this one. We did well to cover so much ground on foot really and although our long hikes were not productive, as so often happens, we were instead successful within close proximity of our accommodation, where we spotted our only

red squirrel of the trip. In truth it was a fairly scruffy individual, blissfully ignorant of our presence and covered in dirt from its diligent foraging. Fortunately, it was also immensely sweet and, even more importantly when you consider that we had barely seen an animal for two days, cooperative, tarrying long enough for us to savour a nice view and take a few reasonable photographs. Our next major destination would be Andenes in the extreme north of Vesteralen, an archipelago situated beyond the far more famous islands of Lofoten, which would be our subsequent port of call. We only had one purpose in Andenes, to take two boat trips to hopefully see sperm whales, which are meant to be more or less guaranteed at this time of year. These are the summer feeding grounds for the solitary adult males, so there would be no females with juveniles on view and we would need to be patient if they vanished beneath the waves as we approached, as sperm whales dive to great depths in order to feed on mainly squid and there were likely to be several minutes between sightings, if indeed we did not lose the animal after it had disappeared. There was also the possibility of encountering killer, pilot and minke whales, whilst in winter, in addition to killer whales, humpback and fin whales are more probable

in this particular stretch of the Atlantic. A little frustratingly perhaps, we were not to be fortunate with any of these species on either of our excursions, but to be fair, the priority was sperm whales and in that respect we were extremely successful, observing at least seven individual whales across the two outings. It is always an enormous privilege to spend time with these gentle leviathans and of the ten total sightings, four were within about 20 to 30 metres and on one memorable occasion a whale emerged directly in front of the boat, maybe five metres from where I was perched with my camera. I was hoping that the results would be as impressive as this, not only for our own benefit, but because I am keen to try and support whale watching tourism in this country, given the fact that Norway is one of only two nations, the other being Iceland, that has consistently ignored the international ban on commercial whaling and continues to slaughter hundreds of these entirely defenceless animals every year. Whilst there are clearly different personnel involved in each industry, it remains difficult to comprehend that a short walk from where we boarded our boat to go looking for whales, there were restaurants openly serving dead ones. We obviously did not eat in any, but some were busy and a few of the locals confirmed that whale meat was still popular with many people in this region. For those who are not aware, the International Whaling Commission, the organisation responsible for calculating the number of whales that can be killed each year, decided in 1982 that whaling was not sustainable and that all commercial whaling should pause from 1985. Known to many as the commercial whaling moratorium, that pause is still in place today and only Norway and Iceland openly disregard it, although for all intents and purposes the Japanese always have as well and on the 26th of December 2018 they handed the world a belated Christmas gift by officially announcing that they too intend to defy the ban and will resume commercial whaling in July 2019. Japan, along with the former Soviet Union and not surprisingly Norway, were also slow to accept the original moratorium, but by the end of 1988 even they had technically stopped and commercial whaling had ceased for the first time since the 11th century, when the Basques began killing whales for profit in the Bay of Biscay. Shamefully, Norway was the first country to break this international accord when they resumed whaling in 1993 and thirteen years later they were joined by Iceland, which exports most of the whales it butchers to Japan. The two nations combined have killed over fourteen thousand whales since turning their back on global opinion and human decency, which is still less than the approximately eighteen thousand dispatched by the Japanese for so called scientific purposes. Known as special permit or scientific whaling, despite the official sounding designation, this duplicitous method of bypassing international law in order to satisfy the demand for whale meat in Japan is not licensed at all and whaling for scientific research purposes has long since been discredited. For a start, if the Japanese are genuinely concerned about the study and conservation of whales, why do they only kill two or three species each year and why would they continue to hunt the sei whale, which is currently classified as endangered? In reality, there are far easier and more humane methods of collecting scientific data than killing an animal and you have to ask what are Japanese scientists still learning from the traumatised carcasses of minke whales, having killed more than sixteen thousand of these

creatures alone since they decided to circumvent the international ban in 1987? In our supposedly modern and civilised age, DNA can be collected from the skin and faeces of whales without harming them and whales can now be traced and studied across the oceans with highly accurate sighting surveys and the photographic identification of individual animals over extended periods. I can guarantee that you will learn far more by studying a single whale over several decades, than you will by blowing it to pieces with an explosive harpoon and serving it to the wealthy in a fashionable Tokyo restaurant. The entire scientific argument is little more than a contemptible farce, as these special permits are not even issued by the International Whaling Commission and are basically granted by the Japanese to themselves. As such, this is commercial whaling in all but name, with no international regulations or global consequences. Much the same can be said of aboriginal subsistence whaling, which is the third type of whaling that has continued since the pause of 1985 and is not subject to the moratorium. The indigenous populations of four countries are officially involved in this form of whaling, Denmark, in terms of the autonomous territory of Greenland, Russia, the United States and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, a small country incorporating several islands in the West Indies. Although the International Whaling Commission scientists provide advice regarding sustainability and annual catch quotas for these nations, like most of the IWC directives, they have no legal significance and are consequently ineffectual. Several countries simply do not acknowledge the authority of the IWC, Denmark again in terms of the Faroe Islands, Canada and Indonesia, all of which allow native communities to hunt and kill whales beyond IWC regulations or advice. Some of these communities, the Inuit people of Nunavut for example, refuse to even report the number of animals they slaughter and in many cases the whales are treated with such little regard by the indigenous hunters, they would have no way of knowing how many they had killed. As I have illustrated elsewhere on numerous occasions, it is myth that all native people are at one with their environment and that they have great respect for the animals they kill. Although these romanticised and outdated notions may still apply in some aboriginal societies, they are certainly not prevalent in this day and age and many indigenous people display an abject lack of concern for the welfare of the animals they are given special dispensation to hunt. There is very clear evidence that whales are commonly killed for sport, including by children for target practice, and in many cases their flesh is left to rot or fed to the dogs. Although the four countries listed above have confirmed that their aboriginal communities were responsible for the death of about eleven thousand whales since 1985, the truth is that worldwide, this figure is likely to be

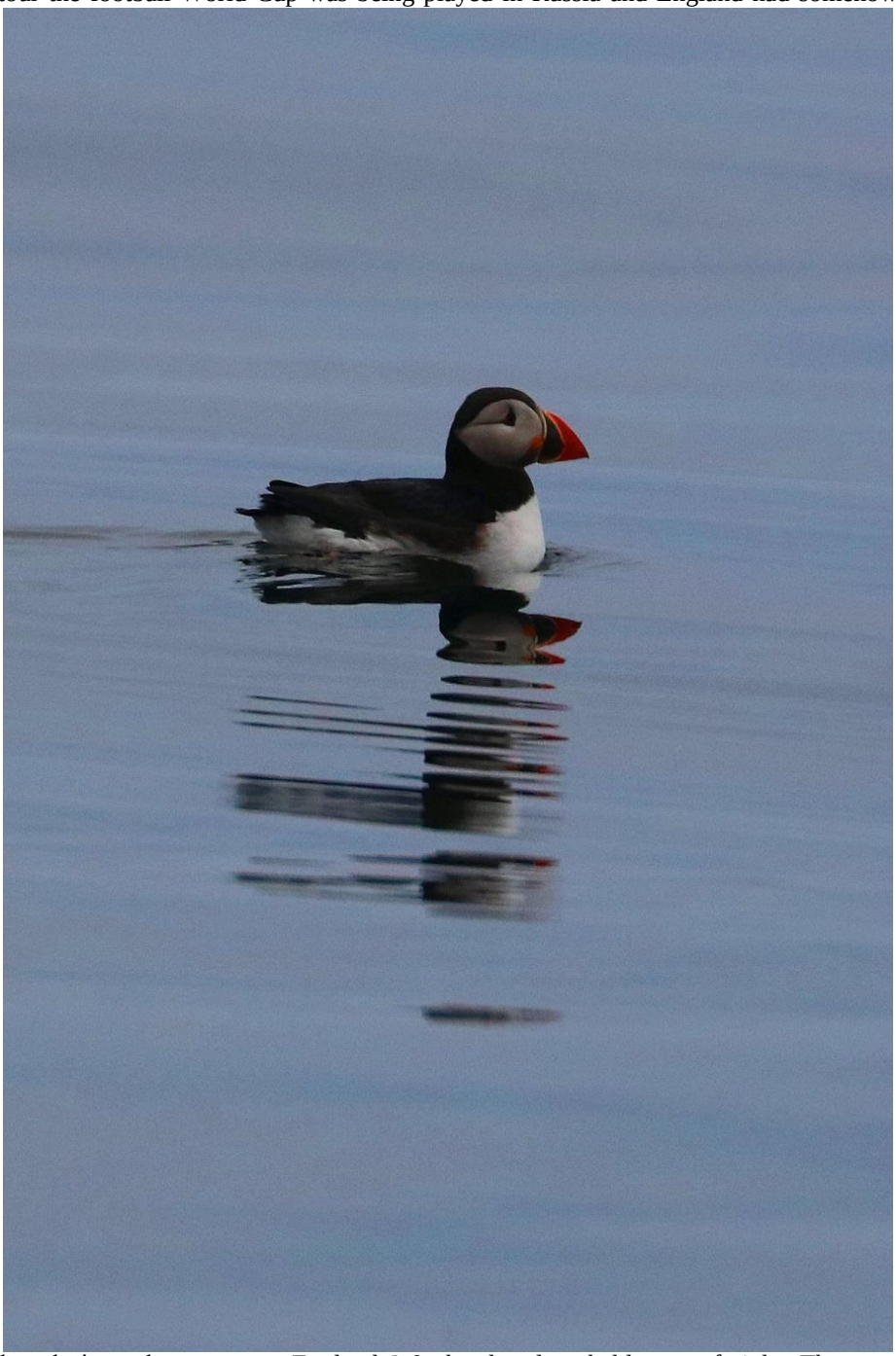
substantially higher. On one widely reported occasion on Baffin Island, experienced hunters with state of the art rifles fired 109 shots at the narwhals they were purportedly hunting for subsistence purposes, the vast majority of which would have hit their target. However, only nine carcasses were landed, an 8% conversion rate if one shot was fired at each whale. Whilst this admittedly sounds unlikely and almost certainly a few whales would have been shot more than once, the figure is not as unrealistic as it may initially appear, not when you consider the damning testimony of another First Nations hunter, who admitted that on a different hunt he had managed to land just one of the fourteen whales he had personally killed. In addition, the IWC quota assessments are based on both nutritional and cultural requirements, which basically means that indigenous people are allowed to continue the tradition of hunting,

just because it has previously played a part in their way of life, which is not that dissimilar to a slave trader insisting that he should still be allowed to kidnap and sell people because it is part of his heritage. There cannot be anything a great deal more traditional than human sacrifice, which has existed in almost every society and dates back at least five millennia, but it would still be hard to make a decent case for its modern day return, in much the same way that men are no longer allowed to marry or have sex with twelve-year-old girls in the United Kingdom. That only changed in 1875, but society is meant to progress and it cannot remain acceptable for people to behave as they want, whoever they are and regardless of the harm that they cause, on the grounds that it once formed part of their culture. The other factor that needs to be taken into account in terms of whaling and subsistence hunting in general, is that many of these native communities no longer require these animals as an actual food source and are instead making a great deal of money by selling their by products, including the valuable ivory tusks in some cases or the actual hunting permits to kill them. The example that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines provides is a useful one, as the inhabitants of this tiny nation have killed less than 50 humpback whales during the previous 33 years, which simply cannot make any nutritional difference to a population of 110,000 over that period

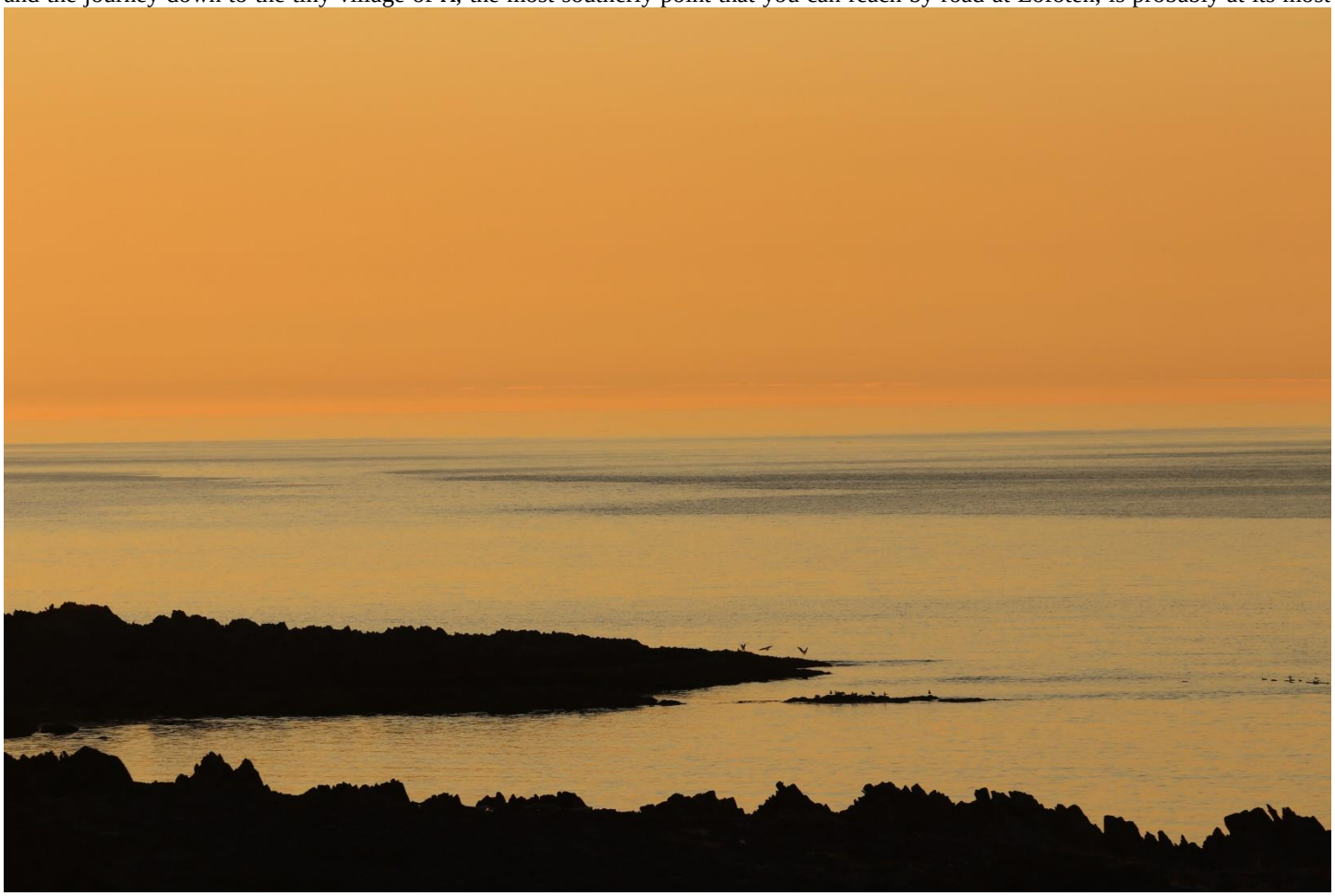
of time. Instead these islanders clearly enjoy the festivities surrounding the annual hunts and are killing and eating whales like you would shop for an Easter egg, nice once a year, but you do not need them to survive. So despite the fact that whaling was ostensibly banned in 1985, over 55,000 whales have been openly slaughtered in the intervening period and that is only the official number that we are formally aware of. Of course bycatch, animals unintentionally killed by the fishing industry, is a far more serious environmental issue, but the world would have still been a better and more civilised place if every country had been able to agree that whaling was inherently wrong and that these majestic creatures would finally receive the protection they both deserved and desperately required, particularly given the fact that three million of them were killed during the previous century alone. Bycatch is

responsible for an astounding 300,000 cetaceans deaths every year, that is over 800 whales, dolphins and porpoises killed each day, as well as thousands of other marine species inadvertently caught in vast fishing nets. The situation is undeniably horrific and urgently needs to be addressed, as does the overfishing of our seas in general, but whaling is of course intentional and while it does not kill as many animals, it goes to the heart of us as a species and highlights our ethical boundaries in terms of our values as a society and the amount of suffering we are prepared to inflict on weaker species that a more noble civilisation would be helping to conserve. As we have witnessed throughout history, humans are not noted for their nobility and whilst some individuals of course do in a world of more than seven billion souls, few nationalities share the same moral compass. On more than one occasion I have been informed that whales are just another food source and that we should not be so sentimental about them, but not only do I rarely agree with reducing wild animal populations for food, I cannot accept that whales should be treated so dispassionately, as these are the largest animals on the planet and by definition the process of killing one has to involve a huge element of cruelty and pain. Can you imagine the outcry if elephants were openly and legally pursued until exhausted and then stabbed to death in front of a watching world, as this is exactly what the governments of Norway, Japan and Iceland expect the rest of the globe to tolerate regarding whales. It has often been said, particularly by the whalers themselves, that if whales could scream the industry could not possibly exist and the International Fund for Animal Welfare recently published their objections to the way in which whales are killed and the extreme cruelty involved. To paraphrase their objections, they state that whales are often pursued to the point of exhaustion before they are harpooned and that exploding harpoons do not always kill the traumatised creatures instantly. Some whales have to be harpooned multiple times before they die and wounded animals are dragged to the whaling vessels, where they are speared and/or shot. Animals harpooned near the tail will drown as their heads are forced under the water when they are winched aboard and because whales are able to reduce their breathing and heart rate, many creatures that may appear dead or unconscious, could well be alive and in unimaginable pain. Regrettably, the situation does not look likely to improve in Norway, as a couple of months before we were due to travel and despite global opposition, the Norwegian government announced that they were increasing their annual whaling quota by a massive 28%, meaning that their whalers can now slaughter 1,278 minke whales every year. Sadly, the fact that Norwegians are one of the few people to flout international opinion and continue the obscene practice of whaling, does not greatly surprise me, as this is indicative of a mentality and culture that clearly enjoys dominating wildlife. I know that a few Norwegians would be surprised to hear themselves so described, as they obviously feel at one with the landscape and seem to take pride in their relationship with nature. However, in many cases they treat what really is a very special destination like a supermarket and view their wild creatures by the kilogram, in much the same way that domestic animals are largely perceived. Few that I have met over the years retain a great deal of awe or wonder regarding wild animals and they generally treat their wildlife as either pests to be strictly controlled or as a resource or commodity to be harvested on demand. In many ways some Norwegians have a similar mentality to the diehard hunting fraternity in the United States and I was not surprised to hear one misguided individual boast that there were more guns per capita in Norway than America, with none of the corresponding social issues. He had no doubt forgotten Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 people with explosives and automatic weapons, the majority children and young adults enjoying a summer camp on the island of Utoya, but even if he was factually correct, guns are only owned for one purpose and the mindset is still of a ruthless domination that has resulted in very low densities of most species in Norway. Several of our guides volunteered that they hunt and many made the distinction that in Norway they only kill for food and not sport, which would be fine if it was actually true and if hunting for food suddenly had no environmental consequences. Unfortunately, neither are the case and over the past ten years more than 2,200 brown bears, wolves, lynx and wolverine have been killed and these are only the reported figures, so you can be fairly certain that the actual number is considerably higher. Between 2009 and 2018, their hunters accounted for almost a thousand lynx alone and even small carnivores can be hunted, including red fox, raccoon dog, badger, pine marten and stoat. Apex predators are openly hunted for sport and routinely killed as a ‘nuisance’, simply because so many civilised Norwegians have forgotten how to share a primeval landscape with them, in much the same way that we

forgot in the United Kingdom hundreds of years ago to be fair. In addition, how can generally prosperous western hunters justify killing wild animals for food when this disturbing and largely selfish mentality has devastated animal populations across the planet and driven numerous species to the brink of extinction or in some truly appalling cases, beyond. Try telling five billion passenger pigeons or the equally defenceless steller's sea cow, that hunting for food is always acceptable and has no ecological impact. Most of the world quite rightly condemns the abhorrent and illegal bushmeat trade, which has had such a devastating effect on literally hundreds of species in Africa and in particular gorilla and other great ape populations. However, many of those involved in this form of poaching are desperately poor and are killing animals in order to feed their families. Norwegians, in contrast, have one of the highest standards of living in Europe and very few need to kill wild animals purely to survive. Much like the Americans that our guide foolishly compared his countrymen to, they do it because they like it and because they believe it is their right. I obviously always try to avoid any major hunting seasons whenever I travel, but I never check a great deal else and am often abroad when significant global events are taking place. During this particular tour the football World Cup was being played in Russia and England had somehow made it to the semi-final for the first time since Italia 90, when Gary Lineker scored, Paul Gascoigne cried and England lost to Germany…again. Although when I was young I was a huge football fan and travelled all over the country to watch my beloved Fulham, I went to school in that part of London and actually lived almost opposite the ground on the Thames in Putney, cricket is my real passion in the sporting sense and I attend very few football matches these days. Hopefully you grow slightly more discerning over the years and as far as I am concerned, as chess is to draughts, or checkers depending on where you live, so cricket is to football and even cricket now comes a very distant second to wildlife in terms of my limited spare time. I did go to Wembley in May to see Fulham beat Aston Villa 1-0 and secure a memorable return to the Premier League, but I would not have even considered incorporating the World Cup into my planning for our Norway tour and was surprised to see England progress to the semi-final, largely in truth as a result of a relatively easy draw opening up for them as a consequence of other unexpected results. After victories against Tunisia and Panama in a decidedly kind group stage, an average Colombia side was defeated on penalties and, as James and I were otherwise occupied with the delightful muskox at Dovrefjell, England produced their best performance of the tournament to beat Sweden 2-0 in the quarter-final. Having suffered years of misery and misfortunate at World Cups, I made time in the schedule for us to watch the semi-final against Croatia, as we had a puffin boat tour booked for that evening, but not until 10pm, by which time England would hopefully have confirmed their first World Cup final appearance since they won the tournament way back in 1966. We certainly should have, as England scored quickly with a lovely free kick and at 1-0 Harry Kane, eventually the tournament's top scorer with six goals, missed a glorious chance to put England 2-0 ahead and probably out of sight. That was perhaps the turning point, as Croatia gradually grew in confidence and equalised in the second half to take the match into extra time. This left us with the dilemma of either staying to watch the additional half an hour and possibly penalties or rushing to get to the puffin tour, which was due to depart in just a few minutes. As it transpired, we made the right decision to leave, as we still had a signal on my phone out at sea and as we sped along the coast towards the puffin colony, the news came through that Croatia had scored again and England were out. We had paid the ultimate price for missing such a great chance when we were well on top in the first half, but in truth it was probably about all we deserved, as we only played two strong teams in the entire tournament and lost to them both, Belgium on two occasions, as they also beat us in the playoff for third place. You do not really deserve to win the World Cup after losing three matches, but it was certainly a massive opportunity missed and there was a genuine regret that England had not seized such a gilt-edged chance to reach the final, where France went on to thump Croatia 4-2. The puffin tour did at least compensate for our untimely departure to some degree, as Bleiksoya Island is home to tens of thousands of breeding Atlantic puffins each year, as well as a host of the usual pelagic or near pelagic suspects, including black guillemots, gannets, razorbills, great cormorants, Arctic terns, shags and black-legged kittiwakes. I am not entirely certain that we would have chosen to leave if we had been guaranteed a



glorious England victory, but given that this did not occur, we were happy enough with our choice and were further rewarded with a first harbour seal sighting and distant views of the white-tailed sea eagles that predate on the puffins and other seabirds during the breeding period from April to August. Although the general direction of our tour remained north into the Arctic, from Andenes we made a short detour in the opposite direction to Svolvaer, a popular tourist destination and gateway to the mesmerising Lofoten archipelago, a region of extreme natural beauty and some of the finest vistas I have had the pleasure to experience anywhere in the world. It was a recurring theme of the tour that we did not have sufficient time to truly appreciate what is a spellbinding destination, as you could easily spend weeks exploring one of nature's masterpieces and there cannot be many better settings to watch the northern lights during the dark winter months. We had entirely the opposite experience of course, but the midnight sun is no less enthralling and the journey down to the tiny village of Å, the most southerly point that you can reach by road at Lofoten, is probably at its most



picturesque at this time of year, when all you can comprehend is bathed in an overwhelming golden light. We explored as far as Vestvagoy on this occasion, the third of the seven Lofoten islands, and stopped more times on this drive than I can remember, sometimes to scan for whales and other wildlife, but more often than not, just to savour the ravishing views. One stop resulted in our only Eurasian otter sighting of the trip and we were also now beginning to see both harbour and grey seals with increased regularity, as well as harbour porpoises. I was hoping that we might also encounter otters on the Trollfjord cruise we were due to make out of Svolvaer, but it was an early morning trip and the only predators in sight were white-tailed sea eagles, which were much closer to the boat than at Andenes. The light at this time of year is generally far better at night, certainly from a photographic perspective, and as we reluctantly departed Lofoten to continue our northerly trajectory, we had the consolation of a midnight sun fjord cruise to look forward to at Tromso. Of course the essential element of any midnight sun activity is the actual sun and unfortunately poor weather somewhat lessened this particular experience, as it was grey and overcast for the entire trip. Given the number of marine species that we could have encountered, including a dozen or so possible whales and dolphins, we were also slightly unlucky in terms of sightings and had only a few grey seals and a single porpoise to show for around six hours at sea. That said, the setting was still of an epic nature and was not a great deal less impressive viewed in a different and less complementary hue. This was definitely true of the distinctive and uninhabited island of Haja, which you can clearly see inspired the design of the Arctic Cathedral, a famous church in Tromso that has become a major tourist attraction since it first appeared in concrete and steel in 1965. In my humble opinion, it is as unsightly and unsympathetic as so much modern architecture, but to be fair, it is probably better viewed in a winter scape, when the surrounding snow would certainly soften the abrasive structure and provide a far more natural backdrop. We only noticed the renowned landmark in passing and missed the opportunity for a contrasting and no doubt more impressive perspective when we forgot to take the Fjellheisen cable car ride on our final evening in Tromso. We were essentially so absorbed exploring the adjacent area and searching for wildlife, that we were over a hundred miles away the next morning before I even realised the oversight. It was too late to turn back and I was sorry to miss what were apparently spectacular views of Tromso and the surrounding fjords and mountains, particularly as our long vigil in the field had not been hugely successful and had only produced a few red foxes and a colony of voles. Whilst it was of course a shame to overlook such a famous attraction, and we had also wanted to hike down the Sherpa Steps, one of numerous hiking trails built in Norway by traditional Sherpas from Nepal, there would be many more magnificent panoramas as we continued our journey deep into the Arctic, now in a northeasterly direction towards Skaidi. The landscape now very much resembled the exceedingly characteristic Arctic tundra and we had started to see our first reindeer littered across the sparse vegetation and rocky mountain slopes. We were to encounter a great number over the course of our final few days and although a few individuals appeared to be the wild version at distance, on range they should technically have all been from domestic herds. Skaidi would have been a good base in many ways, as it sits between the two areas that I wanted to explore and would have meant a shorter drive on one of our two

full days in the region, which, as I probably do not need to keep reiterating, were entirely insufficient for the task at hand. However, I ultimately chose Lakselv, which was significantly closer to my main priorities here, Stabbursnes Nature Reserve and the nearby Stabbursdalen National Park. Our other objective would be Nordkapp or North Cape, which is as far north as you can reach by road in Europe, but is not, as is widely believed, its most northerly point. That distinction actually falls, by about one-and-a-half kilometres, to neighbouring Knivskjellodden. Neither, however, can claim to be the northernmost point of mainland Europe, as both Nordkapp and Knivskjellodden are situated on the island of Mageroya, which is connected to mainland Norway by a bridge, and the most northerly point of continental Europe is therefore Kinnarodden or Cape Nordkinn, which lies to the east in the same county of Finnmark. All of these assertions of course depend on whether you consider Russia to be part of Europe or belonging to Asia, as the

northernmost point of Russia is Cape Chelyuskin, which sits at a latitude of 77º, compared to Kinnarodden at 71º. London, in further comparison, lies at 51.5º and Norway's capital Oslo at 59.91º, while Churchill, that great polar bear destination on the Hudson Bay in Canada, rests at 58.77. Perhaps not surprisingly given its name, Finnmark borders the Lapland region of Finland to the south, as well as Russia to the east, and is home to the Sami people, the indigenous hunter gatherers of Arctic Europe, known historically as Laplanders or Lapps. An integral component of their life and culture across millennia, only the Sami are allowed to own and herd reindeer in both Norway and Sweden and domestic animals have replaced wild herds across much of the reindeer's former range. Consequently, there are only a tiny number of wild reindeer remaining in the entire region, perhaps eight thousand across Norway and Finland and none at all in Sweden, compared to domestic herds totalling up to approximately three-quarters of a million animals. In Norway it is estimated that there are around six thousand genetically pure wild reindeer in four populations and a further twenty thousand or so in nineteen populations that were previously mixed with semi-habituated animals. More than four thousand of these are shot by hunters every year, so reindeer numbers are very unlikely to increase beyond their current levels and all of these populations occur in the south of the country, which basically means that there are no wild reindeer left in the entire Norwegian Arctic, excluding the islands of the Svalbard archipelago. Most visitors sadly do not notice this inexcusable absence, as their traditional Arctic landscape still features the iconic reindeer that we are all so familiar with and very few realise that they are all domestic animals and that they may as well be photographing cows or sheep. The global situation for these animals is similarly concerning, as the last two decades have witnessed a staggering population decline of approximately 56%, with reindeer numbers falling by a disastrous 2.6 million, from an estimated 4.7 million to around 2.1 million. Almost inconceivably, the situation is even worse concerning several herds monitored in Alaska and Canada, which have declined by a barely credible 90% during the same period. Reindeer have often experienced large natural fluctuations in population sizes, but these horrific numbers are unprecedented and it is believed that there are a combination of factors involved, including hunting and several closely related ecological issues that can be clearly attributed to climate change. One of the most serious is a shortage of food, as increased temperatures inevitably result in greater vegetation and scientific studies have indeed confirmed that the Arctic has become greener during the previous 35 years. This may sound ideal for animals that eat grass, but lichen is a huge part of a reindeer's diet, particularly in winter, and some lichens are being outcompeted by taller grasses in the warmer weather. In addition, higher temperatures result in widespread drought and vastly increased populations of flies and parasites, which can have a serious impact on the health of animals that are not used to dealing with insects in these quantities. On my last visit to Alaska, I noticed that some of the reindeer, or caribou as they are known in North America, were being driven insane by a plague of insects and several of these obviously stressed creatures were in very poor condition, probably as a direct consequence. Mild winters and a subsequent increase in rainfall is a major problem as well, as the rain creates impenetrable sheets of ice that the reindeer cannot push their noses through in order to feed, as they would snow. Tens of

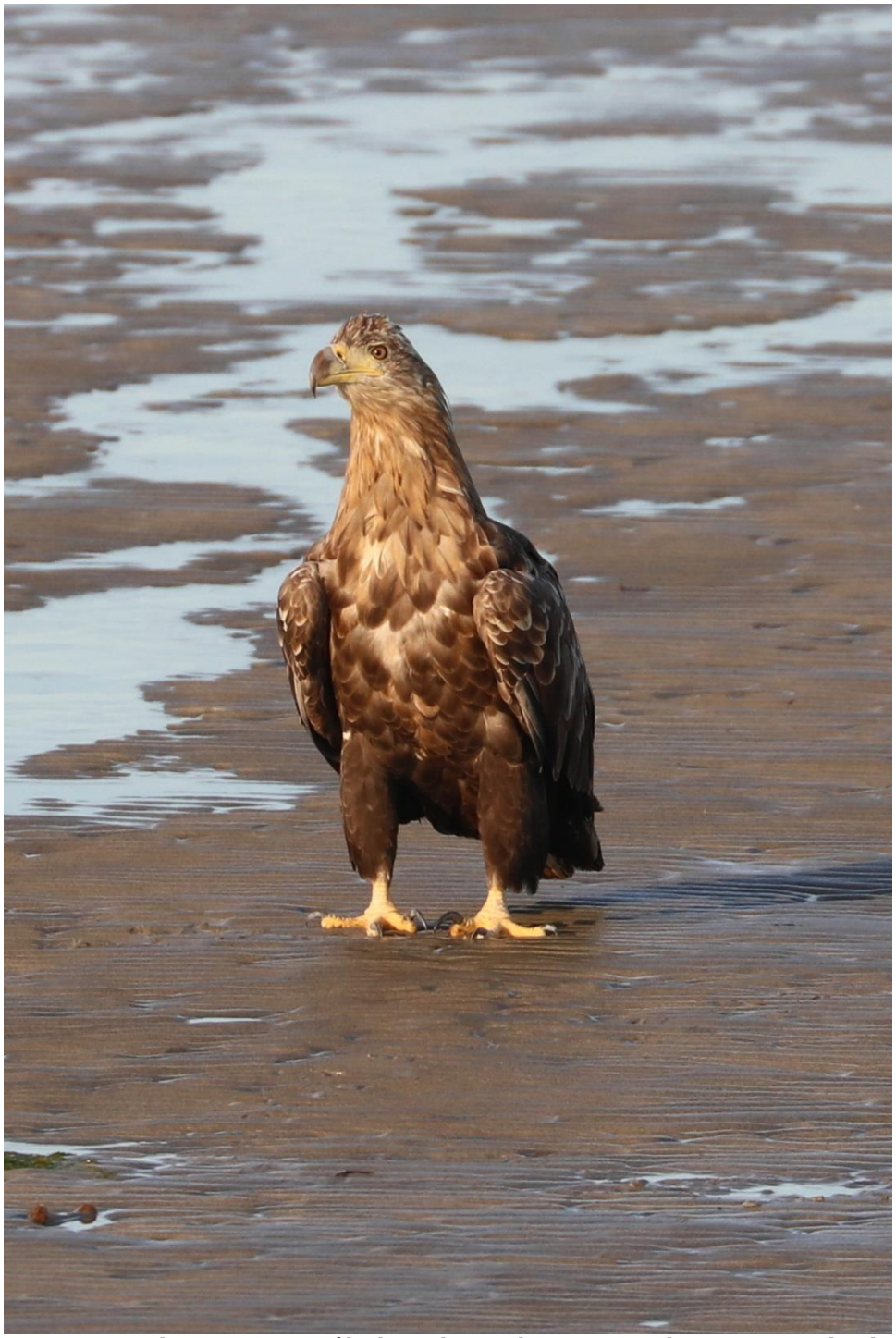
thousands have starved to death in Russia in recent years as a direct result of excessive ice and habitat loss is another critical threat to the continued existence of these fabulously emblematic but grossly exploited Arctic specialists, as it is for almost every species in every corner of the globe. Whilst there are several subspecies of reindeer, only two occur in Northern Europe, the mountain reindeer, Rangifer tarandus tarandus, now found in southern Norway, and the forest reindeer, Rangifer tarandus fennicus, that endures in comparatively low numbers in parts of Finland and Russia. We were very unlikely to see the wild Norwegian mountain version on this trip, the best we could realistically hope for was feral animals from domestic herds, but from Norway we were due to travel into Finland, where we would have the opportunity to at least search for the larger forest variety. For now we would spend much of our

short stay exploring the stunning area around Stabbursnes Nature Reserve and Stabbursdalen National Park, which is apparently home to the most northerly pine forest in the world. Both conservation areas are situated on the pristine Stabburselva River and in close proximity to Porsangerfjorden or Porsanger Fjord, yet another awe inspiring fjord and, at 123 kilometres, one of the longest in Norway. Either factually described or opportunistically marketed as ‘the King of the Fjords’, depending on your perspective and no doubt your cynicism, Sognefjord is the longest of the 1,200 or so fjords in this remarkable country and flows 205 kilometres to the

west coast. At more than 1,300 metres it is also the deepest and although I did initially hope to include Sognefjord on this itinerary, it is situated in the southwest and was simply a detour too far given the limited time available. As I have already touched upon, these time restrictions were a real issue and ideally the tour needed to be at least ten days longer or should have covered much less ground. There is certainly a fabulous wildlife trip waiting to be designed in Norway, but it would require at least five weeks to do really well and even a programme of that duration would involve a great deal of travelling if you wanted to include most of the natural highlights. The balance between travel and searching for wildlife was simply too uneven on this brief sortie and another alternative would be to split the country in two and organise contrasting expeditions in the north and south, which would massively reduce the time wasted between destinations. As it was, the wildlife element of our tour suffered to some degree and although we took advantage of the long summer days and spent as many hours in the field as possible, we were too often on the move and rarely had the opportunity to cover the same ground twice, let alone continually revisit promising areas. When you also take into account the extremely low densities of most species, as well as the fact that it is considerably more difficult to find animals living with the pressure of intense hunting, it is no great surprise that we were less productive than is usually the case. In terms of new mammals, we only had a mountain hare to show for our not inconsiderable efforts around Lakselv and the one animal observed with any regularity, as is so often the case with

these indomitable and highly successful predators, was the red fox. A few moose and harbour porpoises also made welcome appearances and whilst all sightings are of course special and highly prized, our progress was what you could officially term ‘slow’, a euphemism that, in this part of the world at least, translates as ‘if we do not see something soon, I am going to drive my car into that fjord’. It never becomes quite so disheartening that you want to turn your back on mammals, life perhaps but never mammals, and I have yet to reach the stage whereby I would rather be bird watching, regardless of the confounded effortlessness of that particular activity. It was fortunate, both in terms of our sanity and the unnecessary pollution involved in crashing a car into a fjord, that the extraordinary landscape continued to dominate the senses. The coastal drive along the full length of Porsanger Fjord to Nordkapp is as memorable as you might expect, as were the ravishing Arctic Ocean panoramas that greeted us at well past the midnight sun and at almost the end of the world. The visitor centre at Nordkapp was somewhat less inspiring, as the main attraction was a film depicting life in the area and the number of ways in which the locals enjoy killing and eating their wildlife. I am sure that it was intended to be inspiring and to highlight just how resourceful the people of the north can be in the face of such extreme conditions, but in truth it just confirmed the impression that Norwegians have lost sight of this ancient wilderness and how to live in harmony with it. Although it stopped short of a harpoon being fired into the side of an exhausted whale, with perhaps an artistic shot cutting away to reveal a happy Norwegian family about to tuck into a huge succulent whale steak, we still departed in a slightly sombre mood, basically in the knowledge that we were now about to resume our search for an Arctic fox, when in reality, the same regional societies were responsible for their local extinction. We were never destined to find our elusive fox and were not a great deal more successful at our next destination, Vadso on the Varanger Peninsula, which is known as a bird watching mecca and is also home to a variety of mammals. Wolf, lynx, wolverine and both fox species occur, but the stark mountainous tundra is littered with domestic reindeer and

predator numbers are no doubt ruthlessly controlled in this region. A short journey to the south, the birch, pine and spruce forests of the taiga are home to most of these carnivores and brown bears also roam, crossing into the adjoining forests of Russia to the east and Finland to the west. We would have some time there, but ultimately not enough, as perhaps Lofoten aside, Varanger was one of our favourite destinations and we devoted three full days to the desolate and utterly compelling Arctic habitat. The two main drives, clockwise to Berlevag and Syltefjord and in the opposite direction to the former fishing village of Hamningberg, feature some of the most dramatic scenery this absorbing country has to offer and we were fortunate that on one of our drives to that small abandoned village, the weather turned and as the black clouds rolled across the sky and the wind rose and the rain fell, the entire landscape was transformed before our eyes. It was as if the tundra had turned its back on its gentle golden and reddish hues in an anguished heartbeat and reverted to a dark and eternal spirit, long hidden from the glare of the world. It was suddenly vivid and alive and at the same time so terribly inhospitable that we decided to abandon the car and experience the full brutality of the tempest from the windswept cliffs overlooking the turbulent sea. We could have been standing in Mordor or any other forsaken region that a fanciful mind may conjure and although I appreciate that our storm was merely a brief squall in comparison to some of the severe weather experienced here, I was still reminded that in some lonely places of this world, the harsher the elements, the more melodramatic the backdrop becomes. There is a growing industry involving storm watching and whilst the cynical side of me cannot help thinking that it has largely been invented to produce additional income during the inclement off season, just as safari operators now offer guests the opportunity to experience the ‘lush green season’ during what is basically the monsoon, there is still something enticingly primordial about watching a violent storm, particularly one sweeping across the ocean and battering the shore. I have never really needed to avail myself of these tours, as severe and entirely unseasonal conditions basically follow me around the globe and you can be fairly certain that when I am visiting a region, it will suffer its worst weather for centuries, as well as probably civil war, pestilence and general catastrophe. Whilst the mammals were still refusing to cooperate, their avian cousins were far more accommodating and Varanger’s reputation as a first class birding destination is clearly justified. Several hotels cater almost exclusively to birding groups at certain times of the year and the region is so productive in terms of both numbers and rare species, that enterprising local guides have built floating hides, including in one case a converted boat, in order to get guests closer to their exotic targets without disturbing them. The ingenious hide at Batsfjord provides visitors with an intimate and more or less eye level view of a wonderful collection of sea ducks, notably long-tailed duck, common eider, steller’s eider and the fabulously ornate king eider. Elsewhere, the small uninhabited island of Hornoya is the seasonal home to more than eighty thousand breeding seabirds every year, from Atlantic puffins, razorbills and shags to three guillemot species, brunnich’s, black and common, and several types of gull. Easily visited from Vardo in the summer months, Hornoya is the most easterly point of Norway and it is possible to spend a night on the island at the old lighthouse keeper’s cottage. We did not, again largely due to our demanding schedule, but the entire Varanger Peninsula is an important haven for a huge variety of birds and, for all my dark humour regarding fanatical birders, most of which I have to add is entirely true, we always try to devote a fair amount of each trip to the fickle feathered fauna. In addition to a succession of brief stops to photograph individual animals, including a host of white-tailed sea eagles, two magnificent gyrfalcons and three distinct species of owl, we took a long hike at Ekkeroy Nature Reserve, one of several local reserves and the breeding site of 20,000 pairs of kittiwakes. Approximately 50 species have been recorded at Ekkeroy, but it is the sheer quantities, as opposed to the diversity, that attracts a correspondingly healthy population of white-tailed sea eagles. I have observed these astonishingly beautiful and extremely powerful eagles in a number of countries and at Varanger we watched mesmerised as they simply plucked gulls out of the sky, diving from above and killing on the wing. It is never easy seeing

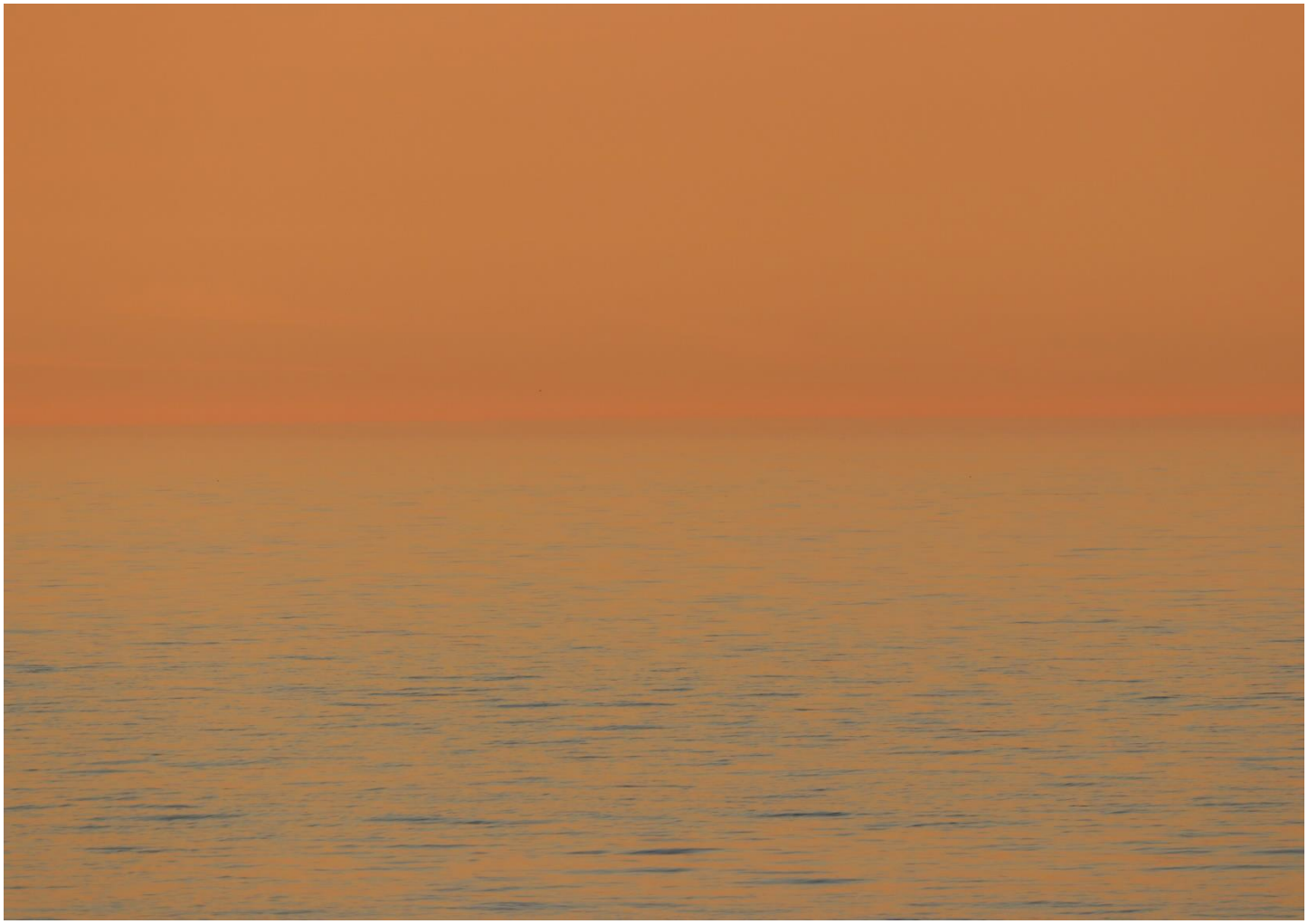


animals die in any circumstance, but at least this was wholly natural behaviour and there is always a sense of privilege on these occasions, as well as a genuine sadness. Although the Arctic skua hunts are ultimately less harrowing, at least those not involving chicks, they are certainly no less spectacular and again we watched in awe as the skuas, or parasitic jaegers as they are now commonly and rather unkindly known, relentlessly pursued and harassed their prey, forcing them to disgorge their food in a surreal and almost poetic aerial ballet. Comparable mammal highlights were still proving to be frustratingly elusive and we found ourselves spending even more time in the field. On one occasion we searched for around 27 hours straight and in total probably averaged around twenty hours a day over the duration of our three-day stay. Much of our time was utilised covering ground slowly in the car and the remainder was devoted to scanning the largely open landscape and hiking in areas we hoped would be productive. Apart from several superb red fox sightings, one of which had its mouth absolutely crammed full of voles, and an ever increasing number of mountain hares, our efforts were largely unrewarded. That was until our final drive towards Hamningberg, when I spotted something dive in the distance that did not at first glance appear to be one of the many harbour porpoises encountered along this stretch of coastline. As always when I am unsure of exactly what I have seen, I stopped the car to check and we both scrambled up on the rocks for a clearer view across the ocean. There was nothing for several minutes and I was beginning to think that we had missed whatever creature I had

so briefly glimpsed, when suddenly James shouted whale and pointed to where a minke whale had surfaced just a few metres below our vantage point. Instead of disappearing out to sea, this serene and utterly majestic leviathan had actually approached the shore and for the next half an hour or so we followed it along the coast where it was obviously feeding, entirely oblivious to our presence. This would be our only new mammal at Varanger, but no matter, as this one magical spectacle was more than ample reward for all our hard work and was actually one of the most memorable moments of a trip that had some lovely sightings, but relatively few exceptional highlights. We travelled south to Kirkenes hoping to improve on that record, but equally aware that we would need our luck to change to some degree, as we had basically tarried so long at Varanger, we now had just a day and half remaining to explore the sumptuous taiga forest of the Pasvikdalen valley, which is shared by Norway and Russia. Including both Pasvik Nature Reserve and Ovre Pasvik National Park, the entire region is one of outstanding natural beauty and of all the destinations that we barely had time to assess, this one deserved far more of our attention. I would actually like to spend a couple of weeks here, but our base at Kirkenes was around eighty kilometres away, which was significantly too far and next time I will stay further south, at a lovely little guesthouse we discovered in the heart of the valley. Given the time available and the distance involved, it did not make any sense to travel back to Kirkenes to sleep, so we instead devoted the last 30 hours of the trip to the atmospheric trails and sparkling lakes of the boreal forest. There was no opportunity to extend, as I would have to drive almost 600 kilometres into Finland early on our final morning and we consequently committed ourselves to an area where several predators occur and brown bears are known to wander between Finland and Russia. We were actually fairly unlucky not to see one, as at least two were spotted during our brief visit and we missed one of these, a mother with two young cubs, by a matter of minutes. Having spoken to a few of the locals, including the owners of the guesthouse, I would expect that three or four days in the area would probably guarantee a bear sighting and any disappointment on our part was tempered by the knowledge that we would shortly be moving on to Finland, where we were certain to see a lot of bears. Instead, we gleefully seized a rare opportunity to immerse ourselves in a remote hidden land and had an enchanting final day exploring the old growth forest, set amid a myriad of barely remembered lakes and prehistoric bogs. We were still looking for

animals, but it is easy to fall under the spell of these forgotten places and as our minds drifted and the pace fell, we simply delighted in our surroundings and the almost spiritual beauty of an ancient landscape. It was hard to escape the feeling that we had somehow accidently stumbled off the trail into our own Mirkwood and although exhaustion and the heat of the day no doubt contributed to our tranquil reverie, there are still special places in this world and Pasvikdalen felt like one. The sightings were almost incidental by this stage and several moose, foxes and hares were joined by a host of forest birds, including western capercaillie, willow grouse and a fabulous northern hawk owl. We were not quite done either and as we drove back having completed our final marathon safari, I spotted a rodent swimming in a narrow river inlet beside the road. We quickly identified it as a muskrat and having failed to find what is a fairly common species throughout the tour, we discovered two within the last hour, barely a kilometre apart. Although this may not have been precisely the spectacular climax I had envisaged when planning the tour, they were still excellent views of two delightful rodents and we had at least maintained our record of finding a minimum of one new mammal at every major destination. A trip total of nineteen does not entirely represent either the diversity that we were hoping to record or the intense work involved, particularly as only two were terrestrial carnivores, but the combination of low densities and hunting pressure is never a productive one and we were not especially lucky either. In terms of our two main targets, my seemingly eternal search for a lynx would continue into Finland and beyond if necessary and I decided that when we returned to Norway we would check more under bridges, as so many unfortunate trolls have blundered out into the sun and been turned to stone, these are probably the best places left to look for them.

No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Red Fox	Vulpes vulpes	Observed at every major destination.
2	Eurasian Otter	Lutra lutra	One swimming at Lofoten.
3	Red Deer	Cervus elaphus	Five sightings of eleven animals, but none further north than Trondheim.
4	Moose	Alces alces	Encountered in low numbers at every destination except Vesteralen, Lofoten and the Varanger Peninsula.
5	Reindeer	Rangifer tarandus	Only encountered in the far north of the country and on range all sightings were likely to be of domestic animals.
6	Muskox	Ovibos moschatus	Three herds and a few scattered individuals at Dovrefjell Sunndalsfjella National Park.
7	Mountain Hare	Lepus timidus	First observed on the drive from Nordkapp to Lakselv and then encountered on a regular basis.
8	Eurasian Red Squirrel	Sciurus vulgaris	A single animal in the Storjord area.
9	Muskrat	Ondatra zibethicus	Two individuals in different water bodies on our final day in the Ovre Pasvik National Park area.
10	Norway Lemming	Lemmus lemmus	Low numbers at Dovrefjell Sunndalsfjella National Park.
11	Field Vole	Microtus agrestis	Relatively common at several locations.
12	Tundra Vole	Microtus oeconomus	A few individuals at Dovrefjell Sunndalsfjella National Park and more commonly observed further north.
13	Bank Vole	Myodes glareolus	Brief, irregular encounters and a small colony near Breivikeidet.
14	Grey Red-backed Vole	Myodes rufocanus	At least one sighting at Dovrefjell and several colonies on the Varanger Peninsula.
15	Harbour Seal	Phoca vitulina	First observed at Andenes and then routinely encountered.
16	Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus	Low numbers at multiple destinations and a small group on a boat trip at Tromso.
17	Sperm Whale	Physeter macrocephalus	Ten sightings of at least seven individual males on two boat tours out of Andenes.
18	Common Minke Whale	Balaenoptera acutorostrata	Two individuals from the coast near Hamningberg on the Varanger Peninsula.
19	Harbour Porpoise	Phocoena phocoena	First observed at Lofoten and routinely encountered thereafter.




Nordkapp
Varangerhalvoya
Vadso
Stabbursdalen
Ovre Pasvik
Tromso
Lofoten Islands
Lemmenjoki
Pallas-
Yllastunturi
Urho
Kekkonen
Abisko
Padjelanta
Stora Sjofallet
Sarek
Saltfjellet-
Svartisen
Muddus
Norwegian
Sea
Rovaniemi
Oulanka
Norway
Oulu
Kuhmo
Russia
Finland
Sweden
Trondheim
Dovrefjell
Patvinsuo
Jostedalsbreen
Linnansaari
Tampere
Fulufjallet
Bergen
Lahti
Turku
Hardangervidda
Oslo
Helsinki
Uppsala
Vasteras
Russia
Lake
Vanern
Orebro
Stockholm
Estonia
North Sea
Gothenburg
Latvia
Denmark
Helsingborg
Malmo
Baltic
Sea
Lithuania
Belarus
Russia
Germany
Poland
500 km
©Wild Globe Travel Consultancy 2018

14 Greenfield Road, Eastbourne,
East Sussex BN21 1JJ, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1323 731865
Mob: +44 (0)7821 640118

Email: jason.woolgar@btinternet.com
Website: www.wildglobetours.com