

This year I've got a great mammal watching opportunity - a summer job as a guide in Hvalsafari Andenes, a whale watching company located in Andenes, Andøya island, Norway. The island of Andøya is situated on the edge of a deep underwater trench - the Bleik Canyon. Upwelling current in the trench makes the area a prime spot for cetaceans year round, with 10 species recorded in the adjacent waters. Apart from that, some other mammals can be found on the island - see details below.

I was staying on the island between July 16th and August 22th, but all the interesting cetacean sightings happened during the first two weeks. I managed to see 6 species of cetaceans, 4 of them being lifers for me:

1. Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*). The most abundant species in local waters, as males come here to feed, and are present all year round. Their powerful clicks, which they emit during the hunt, are easily picked up by hydrophones, so said devices are used by the whale watching boats to find sperm whales. This species was seen on almost every trip. Not a lifer for me, though - I've seen it before on a trip with the same company as a tourist.



2. Orca (*Orcinus orca*). They are more common here in winter, but we've been lucky to observe a pod of 20-30 individuals for some days. Again, not a lifer for me, as I have briefly seen them before in Skjervøy. However, never gotten such good views before! They were seen tail-slapping while hunting fish, spy-hopping and even breaching! Wonderful connection with one of my favorite cetaceans ever!



3. Long-finned Pilot Whale (*Globicephala melas*). My first lifer of the trip. We met a pod of 30-40 individuals, which hung around for some days, always greeting us with spy-hopping and breaching upon meetups. Wonderful animals - each encounter was a day to remember!



4. Risso's Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*). A true specialty! These heavily scarred, grey dolphins normally live much further south, but since 2017 they started to appear around Andenes, with 2-3 sightings every summer season. This year, however, we saw them quite well on at least 5 trips! Looks like they're expanding their range northwards - time will show...



5. Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*). Common and present year-round. However, it's the only whale, that is still hunted in Norway, so it's extremely cautious. Photo of Minke: my colleague Magdalena Pelko.





6. Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*). This creature has been my pain, showing well to all the boats except those I was on. However, the gods of mammal watching saw my frustration, and on one of the trips I was granted a perfect view of this huge, submarine-like whale! A lifetime experience to be in the presence of this gentle giant!



The largest number of cetaceans in one trip was 4, with different composition of species. Apart from whales, the island also delivered some other species - much more than I expected, including one lifer!

7. Grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*). Quite common in small harbors of Norway. The individual I saw was also swimming in the harbor, late in the evening.

8. Stoat (*Mustela erminea*) - a much wanted lifer! First, I saw it running around the cars and pedestrians in a parking lot, but then I managed to track down it's den in a wall of nearby fish factory. It gave me great views, running basically under my legs and feasting on a large coal fish, which was probably dropped by fishermen, while unloading their catch.



9. American Mink (*Neovison vison*). First seen near the same fish plant, and later - on the beach, together with an otter. Photo lifer for me, so I was happy to see it, despite it being an invasive species.

10. Otter (*Lutra lutra*). They're relatively easy to see around the beaches with rocky outcrops in early morning or evening. Interestingly, I saw one feasting on Green Crabs together with American mink.

11. Moose (*Alces alces*). Easy to see around the village of Dvergberg in the roadside fields – w counted 12 in one evening!



Things I missed:

Speaking of cetaceans, Humpbacks, White-Beaked and White-Sided Dolphins and Harbour Porpoises are possible around the island.

I didn't look for porpoises because I have them in great numbers around Bodø.

Humpbacks are mostly there in winter, but still quite rare.

Dolphins are also relatively rare here and more common up north, although guys from another company said, that they saw one White-Beaked hanging out with a pod of Pilot Whales.