



Polar Bear on pack ice

**Oceanwide tour: “Around Spitsbergen,
In the realm of polar bears and ice”**

9 nights, 26 July - 04 August 2025

John Van Niel





MAMMAL LIST: 11 species noted below

SS = Single Sighting

MS = Multiple Sightings

SI = Single Individual

MI = Multiple Individuals

P0 = No realistic photo opportunity

P1 = Poor photo opportunity

P2 = Average photo opportunity

P3 = Excellent photo opportunity

Species		Notes	
Svalbard Reindeer	MS/MI/P3	Numerous	
Arctic Fox	MS/MI/P2	5 individuals, none very close	Lifer
Polar Bear	MS/MI/P3	2 on pack ice	Lifer
Beluga Whale	MS/MI.P2		
Minke Whale	MS/MI.P2		
Walrus	MS/M!/P3		Lifer
Harbor Seal	MS/MI/P2		
Bearded Seal	MS/MI/P2		Lifer
Harp Seal	MS/MI/P2		Lifer
Ringed Seal	MS/MI/P2		Lifer
Hooded Seal	MS/MI/P2		Lifer

Tips:

1. The new 2025 rules regarding minimum distances for Polar Bear viewing do not apply to bears on pack ice. Otherwise it varies from 300m to 500m depending on month.
2. If you visit a Walrus haul out, choose a viewing spot near the shore as they will sometimes swim close to tourist groups to investigate. I missed a great photo opportunity by being in the wrong spot.
3. My checked bag was delayed by 24 hours coming from Oslo. Many people told us that is common. Glad we arrived two days early!
4. As Jon Hall mentioned in his 2024 Svalbard trip report, the guides cannot be counted on to accurately identify all the mammals seen. For example, we were told that Hooded Seals are “never seen”.

Overview: Laura and I booked a 9 night expedition cruise through Oceanwide and had a fantastic time! We had numerous memorable wildlife encounters of the furry and feathered kind. The views were stunning, the guides were very attentive and friendly, the food was great and we couldn't have asked for better weather.

On a personal note, I haven't completed a trip report in a while. I could never find the time to finish them up. Something like “perfect is the enemy of good”. Therefore, I present you with “good enough”. If anyone wants further details, please email me at jvnmammals@gmail.com

MAMMALS

1. **POLAR BEAR:** We saw three bears, the first two on the pack ice. Our first sighting was the absolute best as the bear approached the ship very closely and the entire passenger and crew gathered on the decks in absolute silence to spend about 40 magical minutes with her.



The second bear was more distant and was on a seal kill.



A highlight for me was finding bear tracks on one of our shore excursions. The tracks were not fresh. Tracking adds another layer of enjoyment to my mammal watching. Notice the smaller paw print on top of the track on the right. This was a female and her young.



2. **WALRUS:** I spotted the first Walrus swimming near the ship, but it was not a great view. Later in the trip, we stopped at a haul out site and had long, unobstructed views. The expedition team split us into two groups so only half the group (around 50 people) would be viewing the Walrus at a time. Laura and I joined the first group to view the Walrus while the other group went on a walk. When it was time to switch, we just held our ground and one of the expedition team came to us and said “You want to stay?” We smiled and said yes and enjoyed our “double viewing”.



3. **Reindeer:** We spent two days in Longyearbyen before our ship sailed. We found some nice bulls on the edges of town and one day exited our hotel to find one grazing in the sled dog parking area :). On the tour, Reindeer were plentiful on many of the shore excursions.



Reindeer with the Plancius in the background

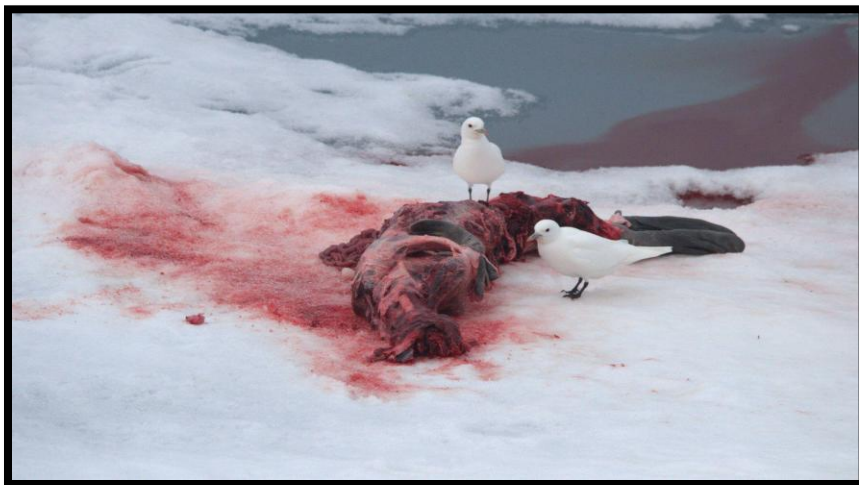


4. **ARCTIC FOX:** We saw six individuals, none particularly close. But it was a species I really hoped to see. Apparently, very close encounters are not unusual.



5. **WHALES:** We only saw Beluga and Minke. I say “only” because we really hoped for Bowhead.
6. **SEALS:** We had nice views of five species of seal. Most were at binocular range rather than telephoto lens range. My photos are substandard. I will relay one note though: If you have not read Jon Hall’s excellent 2024 trip report I encourage you to. He provides much more detail than I was able to muster here and the photos are amazing.

BIRDS OF NOTE:



IVORY GULL



PURPLE SANDPIPER



BARNACLE GOOSE