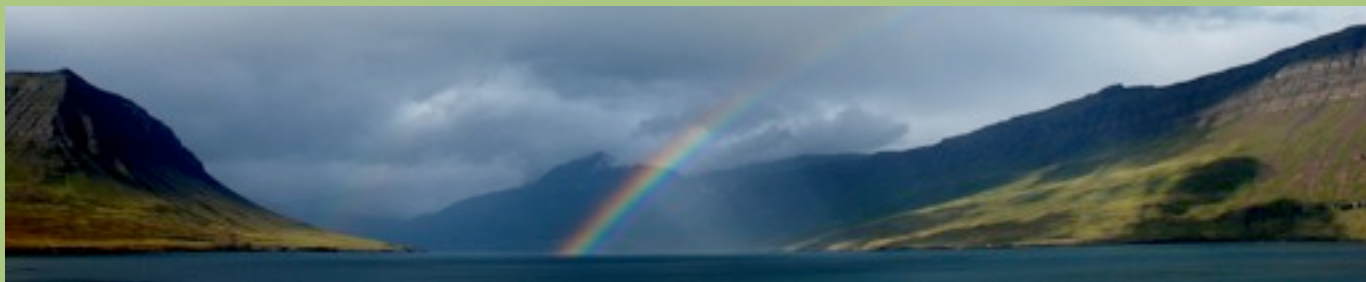


Friends of Skálanes



2011 newsletter

Welcome to the Skálanes Nature and Heritage Centre newsletter 2011 - keeping you up to date with life at the end of the world

Tough times but positive outcomes

A place like Skálanes is a huge undertaking and a lot of the work and logistics are complicated, expensive and not commercial. The long term commitment can be daunting and difficult to justify in a world driven on by an ever more complex monetary system, exploitation of natural resources and material consumption. We, the Icelandic family that have dedicated our time and lives to this place, came to the point this year of discussing amongst ourselves if we should close after this year. The decision was made to keep going, and this was largely influenced by the good will felt from, and the friendships made with, all of our "guests"; and the belief in that we are all together in taking our joint project towards something good and true, which is of value for a long term change towards a society that is healthier in every aspect.



The Skálanes team 2011

Holding it all together were a good team made up of Paul Turner and Izzy Morgan who worked extremely hard for five months as wardens of Skálanes this summer, Bjarki Borgthorsson a native local archeologist with a keen interest in nature, Wren Franklin and Poppy Wood who are yearly migrants taking care of the autumn and Ólafur Pétursson; a dodgy character with a questionable position (!)



Eider down duvets

The eider colony continues to grow every year and we are very proud of this symbiotic relationship we have with the ducks. We are now able to offer homemade and sustainable duvets for sale. From

duck to duvet this product is intimately tied to the landscape, wildlife and people of Seydisfjörður.

A place of learning

Over the summer our visitors included university students, environmental volunteers, professionals in nature, heritage, academia, food production and arts, thousands of tourists and a pagan priest to mention but a few. Whilst learning about Iceland, Skalanes and the issues we work with, these guests and friends contributed to and furthered our ever widening range of subjects, be it theoretical or practical. The questions of sustainability, food, resilience and economics keep rising higher and higher on our agenda and towards this end we have been realising our ideas with a hands-on approach.



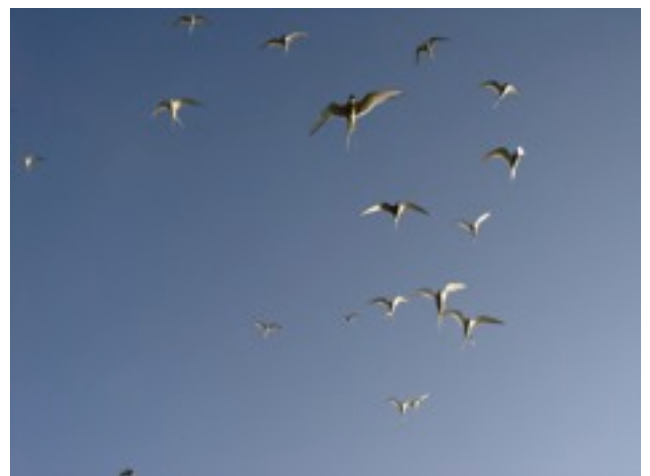
Low impact farming

No doubt many of you will remember the chickens at Skalanes from previous years. In addition to these, we now also have 30 farmyard ducks, 4 pigs, 4 cows and honey bees. A vegetable patch has been established and was producing salad, potatoes and kohlrabi and more by late summer. Guests and groups have benefitted from homemade produce including beer, cheese, ice cream, bread, cakes and honey. The chickens turned out to be a part of a genetically unique breed of chickens, most likely dating back to the 8th or 9th century colonization of Iceland. Many of the groups had a hand in this little farming experiment of ours and in the future we hope to have a full yearly circle of produce and low intensity farming at Skalanes making at least the food sustainable.



Notes from the field

The list of birds recorded on the reserve this season reached 51 species and included some interesting vagrants, including Chiff chaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), Red poll (*Acanthis flammea*) Swift (*Apus apus*) Barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) and House martin (*Delichon urbicum*). Does this point toward some future summer breeders? The Arctic terns (*Sterna paradisaea*) began to arrive on the 4th of May, the first eggs were laid around the 10th of June and a total of approximately 400 incubated nests were recorded. Unfortunately no chicks fledged and this continues a trend of probable starvation, seen all over the northern hemisphere and at Skalanes for the last 5 breeding seasons. This is thought to be due to changes in food availability linked to sea water temperature rise. Only two 1st summer juveniles were recorded. A greylag goose with a neck ring seen on the reserve was traced back to Sutherland UK where it was ringed on 8/1/2011.



New art project



The conservatory walls play host to the first part of an ongoing art project exploring pagan symbolism in Icelandic culture. Local artist Goddur led a group of 5 students to begin painting the mural.

Environmental Volunteers

Lots of tasks have been completed around the reserve by the various volunteer groups, including the culmination of the major part of our reforestation work. To date over 100,000 native trees have been planted.

A wet section of the main hiking trail was hugely improved through the skills and experience of 6 John Muir Trust volunteers. Read their report here :

www.jmt.org/news.asp?s=2&cat=Land&nid=JMT-N10596



Two of the foot bridges have been replaced and lovingly painted by SEEDS volunteers, whose endless enthusiasm, hard work and good nature shone through in both of this year's groups.

Looking to the future

The summer of 2011 has been the busiest by far since we started our little bubble of reality at the end of the world. This bodes well for our future.

Over time the productive capacity of Skálanes is increasing and will, in part, be able to reduce the demand for external inputs. Food production and consequent processing is developing steadily and is valuable beyond its productive capability, for the opportunity for visitors to be involved in the keeping of animals, growing of vegetables and using the produce in the kitchen.

This work towards greater self-sufficiency is important in making Skálanes Nature and Heritage Centre more resilient in the face of external shocks, both environmental and economic.

Many thanks to everybody that came this year and all previous years to work alongside us in making Skálanes what it is.

On behalf of everybody
Ólafur Örn Pétursson
and

Bjartur the Lord of Skálanes
Devourer of All Things Rotten
(unless the pigs get there first).

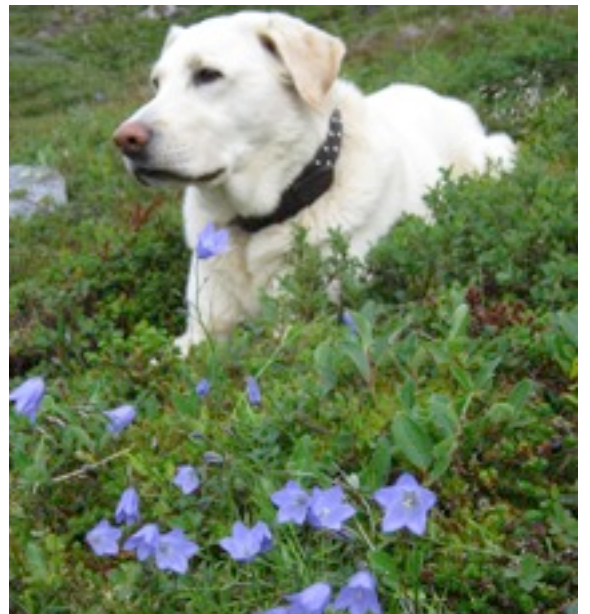
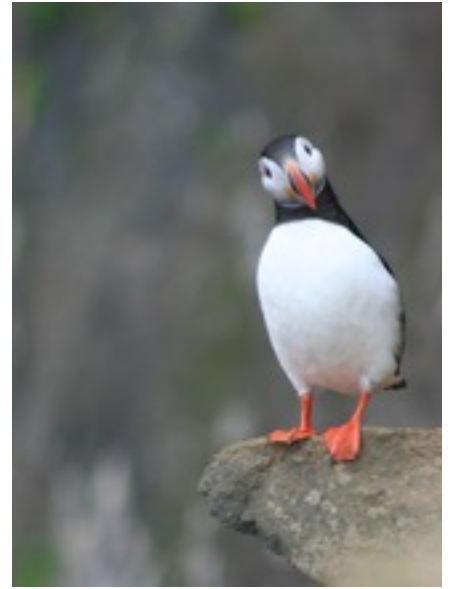


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