

The image features two whales swimming in deep blue water. One whale is in the foreground, larger and more detailed, while another is behind it. Large, semi-transparent letters 'IHW' are overlaid on the background. The text 'Science & Education Report' is centered in white.

Science & Education Report

MS Spitsbergen

14 – 21 February 2026

Ultimate Norway –
Arctic Expedition under
the Northern Lights





Science & Education Program

Our Science and Education Team accompanied you during your expedition to the remote communities and impressive nature of Arctic Norway.

We had the opportunity to explore our destination's natural beauty, exceptional wildlife, and rich culture. We organised lectures and activities on board and explored our destinations through on land and from the sea.

History & Culture

During our expedition along the coast of Northern Norway, we explored a cultural history stretching from the Viking Age to the present day, gaining insight into why churches were built on small islands strategically located along historic shipping routes. Stories of fishing communities brought to life the seasonal rhythms and resilience that have long defined coastal settlements.

A visit to Trollfjord and expedition boat cruising, offered a closer understanding of how geography, resources, and access to the sea shaped where and how people chose to settle.





Lofotfiske

In Lofoten, we explored both the stunning landscapes and the rich history of the region, learning about the famous winter cod fishery that takes place from January to April: *Lofotfiske*. During this period, thousands of fishermen participate in the traditional Lofoten fishery for the skrei (cod) that comes to Lofoten to spawn.

The Vikings were the first to hang cod to dry, preserving it for food on their journeys. Today, cod is still dried on racks, just as it was in Viking times. First practised over a thousand years ago, this fishing tradition continues to thrive today, attracting fishermen from across Norway and remaining a cornerstone of coastal life.

Friluftsliv

During our seven-day voyage, we immersed ourselves in nature through the Norwegian concept of *friluftsliv*. This term encompasses more than just spending time outdoors; it emphasizes actively engaging with nature and recognizing our place within it. Throughout the journey, we truly embraced this philosophy.



Arts & Crafts

Creativity flourished on board during our arts and crafts sessions, where guests transformed their reusable water bottles into personalized keepsakes and created their own Carnival masks inspired by Arctic colours and wildlife.





Geology

As we sailed along Northern Norway's coast, we travelled across landscapes shaped by nearly 1.8 billion years of Earth's history.

Beneath the rugged peaks lies ancient crystalline bedrock, later uplifted during the Caledonian Orogeny, when continental collision built vast mountain ranges some 400 million years ago.

Over time, erosion and repeated Ice Age glaciations carved deep fjords and sharp ridgelines, creating the dramatic scenery unfolding around us from the deck.

Aurorasaurus

We contributed to aurora science by providing our observations of auroras during geomagnetic storms and substorms!

This information will assist Aurorasaurus scientists in collecting data from Northern Norway, a region with very few residents. If you would like to contribute your own observations, it's not too late!

Visit [Aurorasaurus](#) to learn more about the project and submit your photos!





iNaturalist

Throughout our expedition, we documented the flora and fauna of Northern Norway and uploaded all our findings to the iNaturalist biodiversity platform.

During our voyage, we submitted **58** observations of **41** different species. This effort contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the geographical distribution of species and can aid researchers in their ongoing studies and conservation efforts to protect these species.

View our data submitted on our [iNaturalist project](#)



The Magical World of Moss

During our microscope session we took a closer look at some moss. A basal, non-vascular plant, moss does not contain roots or a stem for the uptake and transport of water. Instead, mosses absorb water over their cell walls, directly from the environment. We were able to see the cellulose structure of the cell wall under the microscope, while marvelling at the beauty of these often-underappreciated plants.



Underwater Drone

We used a Blueye Pioneer underwater drone to explore the underwater world of Norway, including on the island of Tranøya, and also in the harbour at Narvik.

Tranøya demonstrated a typical sandy-benthos ecosystem, where we spotted numerous organisms including tunicates (pictured), and chameleon shrimp. In Narvik, we used the drone to explore the underwater shipwreck of M/S Neuenfels, finding numerous sea stars and soft corals.

View the highlights from our underwater drone footage [on YouTube](#)



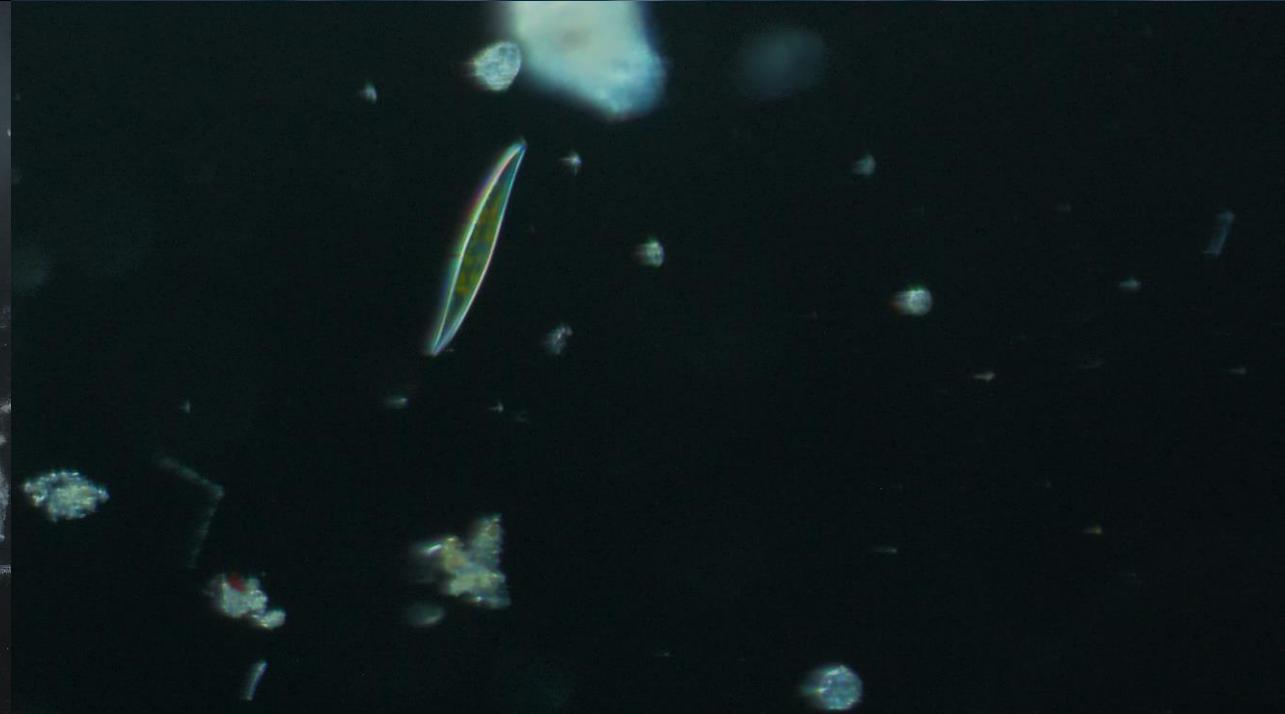


Plankton Samples

During the polar night season, the levels of plankton in the fjords are very low. But upon the return of the sun, we see life returning to the fjords.

This voyage we took two 30-minute plankton samples in Ulvøya, one for phytoplankton and one for zooplankton.

The most numerous zooplankton species found were copepods, and we also managed to collect various types of diatoms (phytoplankton) and some nauplius-stage crustacean larvae (pictured).



Wildlife List — Birds





Wildlife List – Seabirds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	great cormorant	Kormoran	grand cormoran
<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	european shag	Krähenscharbe	cormoran huppé
<i>Larus marinus</i>	great black-backed bull	Mantelmöwe	goéland marin
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	European herring gull	Silbermöwe	goéland argenté
<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	black-legged kittiwake	Dreizehenmöwe	mouette tridactyle
<i>Cephus grylle</i>	black buillemot	Gryllteiste	guillemot à miroir
<i>Alca torda</i>	razorbill	Tordalke	petit pingouin
<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	Atlantic puffin	Papageitaucher	macareux moine
<i>Alle alle</i>	little auk	Krabbentaucher	mergule nain

Wildlife List – Shore Birds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	grey heron	Graureiher	héron cendré
<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	whooper swan	Singschwan	cigne chanteur
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	mallard	Stockente	canard colvert
<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	long-tailed duck	Eisente	harelde kakawi
<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	common scoter	Trauerente	macreuse noire
<i>Mergus serrator</i>	red-breasted merganser	Mittelsäger	harle huppé
<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	common eider	Eiderente	eider à duvet
<i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	king eider	Prachteiderente	eider à tête grise
<i>Calidris maritima</i>	purple sandpiper	Meerstrandläufer	bécasseau violet

Wildlife List – Land Birds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Corvus corax</i>	northern (common) raven	Kolkrabe	grand corbeau
<i>Corvus cornix</i>	hooded crow	Nebelkrähe	corneille mantelée
<i>Pica pica</i>	Eurasian magpie	Elster	pie bavarde
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	European starling	Gemeiner Star	étourneau sansonnet
<i>Turdus merula</i>	Eurasian blackbird	Amsel	merle noir
<i>Passer domesticus</i>	house sparrow	Haussperling	moineau domestique
<i>Parus major</i>	great tit	Kohlmeise	mésange charbonnière
<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Eurasian Blue tit	Blaumeise	mésange bleue
<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	white-tailed eagle	Seeadler	pygargue à queue blanche
<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	snow bunting	Scheneeammer	plectrophane des neiges



Norway's White-Tailed Eagles

The white-tailed eagle, one of Norway's iconic birds, is a sight we were excited to see.

Once considered endangered and locally extinct in some areas, conservation efforts have helped this species make a remarkable recovery in Norway.

Whether you spotted it on land, from the expedition boats, or during the Eagle Safari in Svolvær, we hope you caught a glimpse of this incredible master of the skies.

Wildlife List – Mammals



Wildlife List – Mammals



SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	FRANÇAIS
<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	common seal (Harbour Seal)	Seehund	phoque commun
<i>Alces alces</i>	moose	Elch	élan
Lemmus lemmus	Norway brown lemming	Berglemming	lemming des toundras

What's That Track?

We do not always have to see the wildlife to know it has been around. Taking note of the tracks and signs left behind by fauna can give us valuable insights into what species have been roaming around the wilderness.

Taking the opportunity to slow down and absorb nature reminds us that if we take the time, there is often more to see than meets the eye.

We hope you enjoyed exploring the more subtle signs of nature with us and continue to embrace this spirit wherever you may explore next on your travels.



A photograph of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) in shades of green and yellow, dancing over a dark mountain range and a body of water. The sky is filled with stars. Overlaid on the right side of the image is the word 'THX' in large, semi-transparent, green, serif capital letters. Below the 'THX' text, the phrase 'Connect with your inner scientist' is written in a white, sans-serif font.

THX

Connect with your
inner scientist