

Circumnavigating Spitsbergen – In the Realm of the Polar Bear

MS Fram

2 – 11 August 2026



History & Culture

Ny-Ålesund

At nearly 79°N, Ny-Ålesund is the world's northernmost year-round research station — once a coal-mining outpost, now an international hub for Arctic science. In 1926, Roald Amundsen, American Lincoln Ellsworth and Italian Umberto Nobile took the Norge airship over the North Pole from here; his mooring mast and bronze bust still honor Svalbard's exploration legacy.



Science Boat

During this voyage, we carried out seven science boat outings between Hornsund, at the southernmost part of Spitsbergen, all the way north to Mushamna.



Science Boat

We performed CTD measurements, collected water samples, and launched our hydrophone to record the underwater soundscapes. Among our results, we observed megalopa larvae of crustaceans, larval sea worms and copepods, as well as adult individuals. We detected a bloom of zooplankton (copepods) all around the archipelago, while phytoplankton bloomed along the ice edge.

Together, these results will help us better understand the ongoing changes in the Arctic Ocean. We will submit our data to the [EMODnet](#) network at the end of this voyage.



Science Boat

This photo, taken through our microscope, shows a plankton sample from Smeerenburgreen, which was full of zooplankton. The sample contained adult copepods, bivalve and sea snail larvae, and nauplius larvae.



Underwater Drone

We deployed our underwater drone in Jotunkjeldene and recorded the unexpected presence of kelps (*Laminaria* spp.) in shallow waters (6 m depth), covered by fine sediments from the surrounding glaciers. Soft sediment bottoms are also the preferred habitat for sea cucumbers and other deposit-feeding organisms such as marine worms and brittle stars.

Kelp forests are unique and vital ecosystems found in temperate and polar waters that can thrive in harsh environments such as glacial areas. Help save the kelps.

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

The logo for blueye, featuring the word "blueye" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

Temperature: 8.2 °C

Heading: 317 °

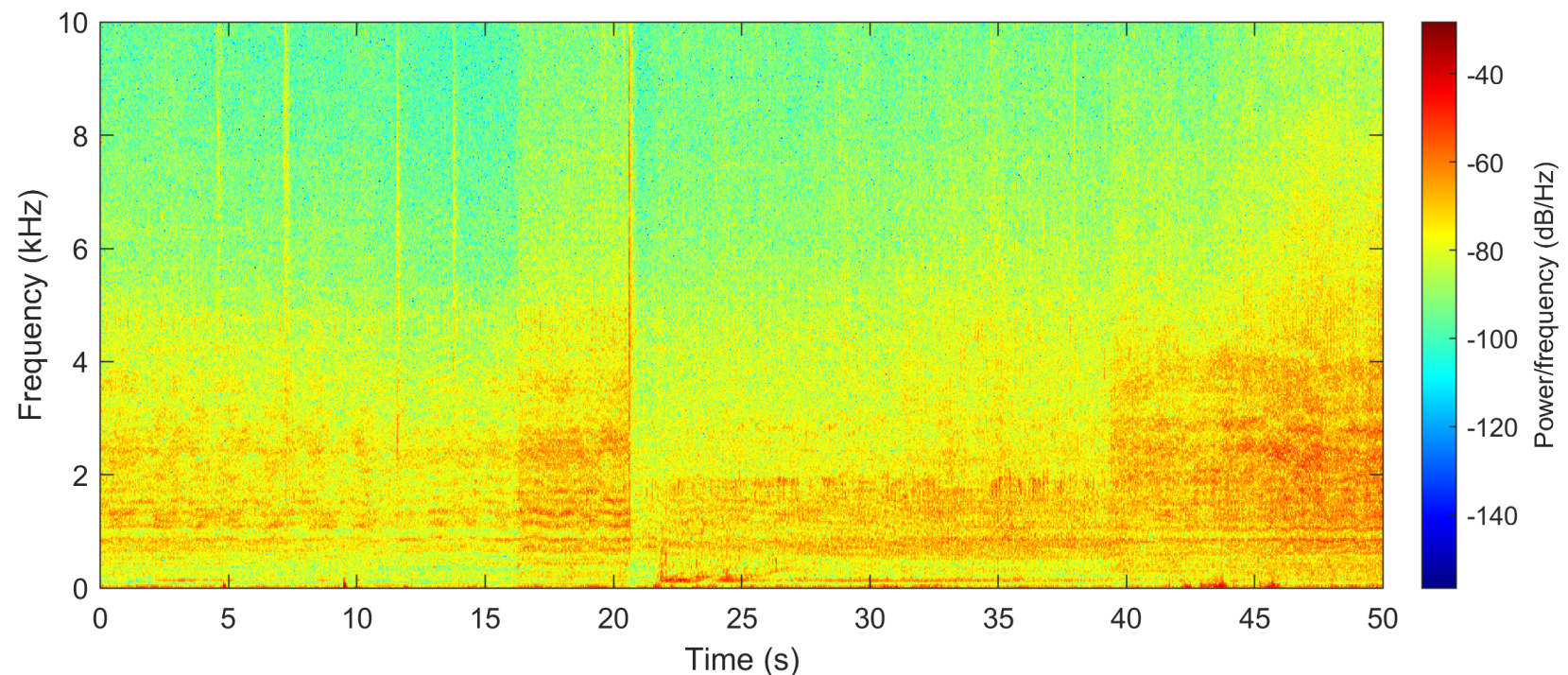
Camera: 0 °

Depth: 6.6 m

Science Boat

Using our hydrophone, we listened to the underwater world and learned that it is not silent. Among other sounds reminiscent of murmuring cascades and rainfall, we could make out the signature of the ship, represented in this spectrogram — a visual representation of sound — by the red colours at the bottom.

This audio data contributes to the overall monitoring of the Arctic Ocean, and we will submit it to the [EMODnet](#) platform.





WAVE Project



Guest Scientists

Dr. Charlotte Findlay & Sophie Cox

Charlotte and Sophie from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh were the guest scientists on board this expedition. They were conducting research surveys for the project Whales and Arctic Vessels (WAVE) to better understand and minimise the impacts of vessels on Arctic whales. They carried out 72 hours of survey effort from the bridge of MS Fram and collected data on 10 species of marine mammal, including Svalbard's endangered beluga whales, a population of only 600 animals. WAVE's research is made possible through the support of the HX Foundation and HX Expeditions, and the WAVE team would like to thank you for all the support you provide.

Keep up to date with the project and stay involved: www.wave-arcticwhales.com

Please send us marine mammal photos:
l.mcwhinnie@hw.ac.uk



Beach Clean-up

MS Fram is on a mission to collect ocean waste in the isolated locations we visit.

We collected 14.86 kg of ocean waste during our voyage, most of it at Smeerenburg.

Since the beginning of the Svalbard season, we have collected 67.86 kg of waste in total, which we carefully disposed of in Longyearbyen.



Wildlife

List — Marine Mammals

Wildlife List – Marine Mammals



SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH
<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	common minke whale	Zwergwal
<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	blue whale	Blauwal
<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	humpback whale	Buckelwal
<i>Delphinapterus leucas</i>	beluga whale	Weißwal
<i>Ursus maritimus</i>	polar bear	Eisbär
<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	harbour seal, common seal	Seehund
<i>Pagophilus groenlandicus</i>	harp seal	Sattelrobbe
<i>Erignathus barbatus</i>	bearded seal	Bartrobbe
<i>Odobenus rosmarus</i>	walrus	Walross



Happywhale

During this voyage, we were fortunate to spot several marine mammals, including minke whales, walruses, and polar bears. The most remarkable encounter was the magnificent blue whale we found along the ice edge, the largest animal on Earth.

Thanks to Lilia's efforts, we submitted one photo of the blue whale's dorsal fin to the Happywhale project. We matched it with a previously known individual, HW-BM0200196, from the Azores, highlighting for the first time a migration pattern from subtropical Europe all the way up to Spitsbergen.

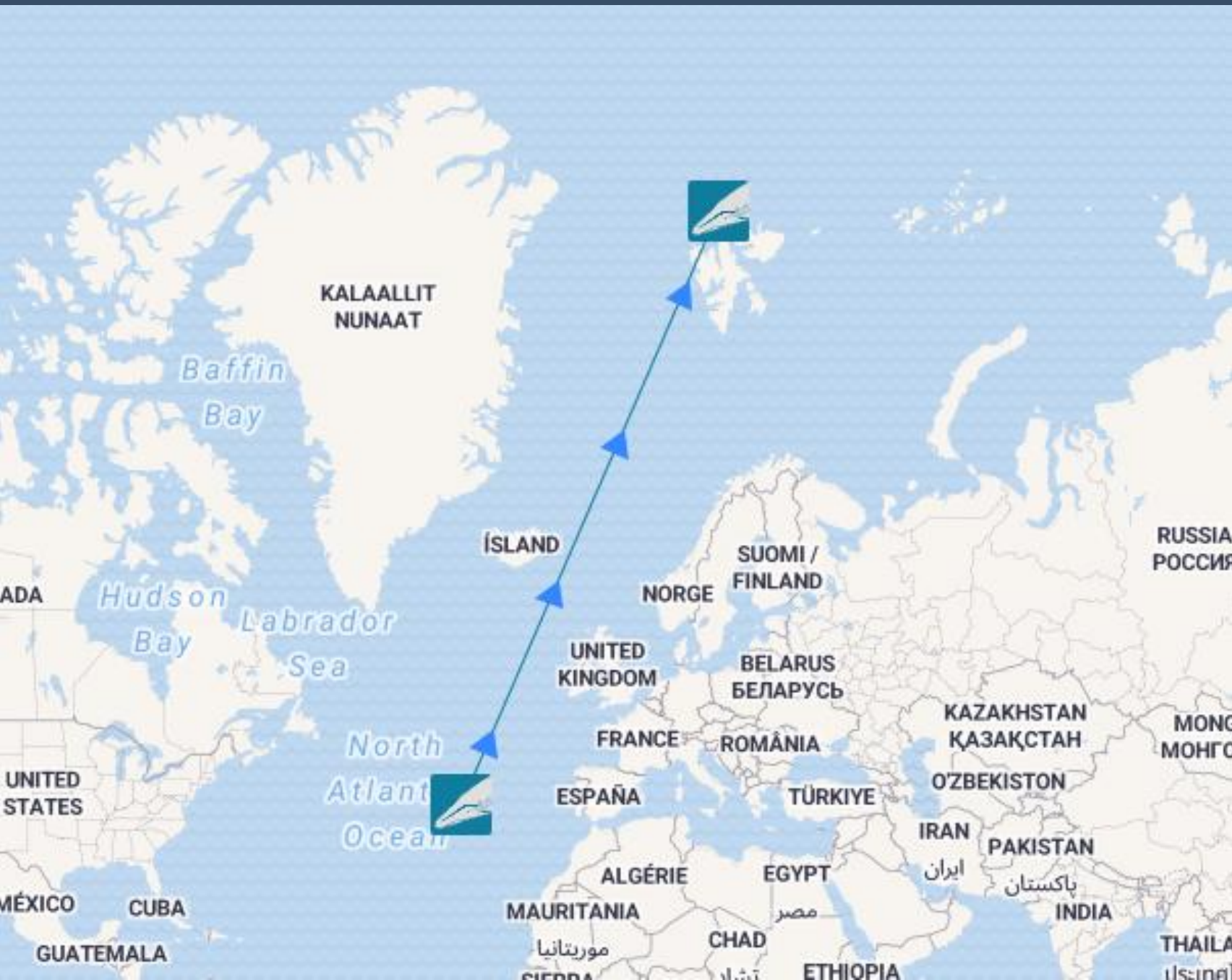




Happywhale

We hope you keep your eyes on the horizon for wildlife once you are back home. We may see you on board again soon. Thanks for travelling with HX.

Do not forget to visit MS Fram's profile on Happywhale by clicking [here](#), and to read this [blue whale's biography here](#).





Norwegian Polar Institute

Svalbard Visitors' Marine Mammal Sightings Database

Since the start of the season, we have submitted our marine mammal sightings to the Norwegian Polar Institute as part of our voyage. This has helped to document the abundance and distribution of marine mammals around the archipelago. During this voyage, we recorded the presence of 13 polar bears, 33 belugas, 12 minke whales, 1 blue whale, and 29 walruses.

Please note that these statistics do not include the sightings recorded by Charlotte Findlay, our guest scientist, while on board MS Fram during this voyage.





Wildlife List – Land Mammals

Wildlife List – Land Mammals

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH
<i>Rangifer tarandus</i>	Reindeer	Rentier
<i>Alopex lagopus</i>	Arctic fox	Polarfuchs



Wildlife

List — Birds



Wildlife List – Seabirds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH
<i>Alle alle</i>	little auk/dovekie	Krabbentaucher
<i>Cephus grylle</i>	black guillemot	Gryllteiste
<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	Atlantic puffin	Papageitaucher
<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	northern fulmar	Eissturmvogel
<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	glaucous gull	Eismöwe
<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	black-legged kittiwake	Dreizehenmöwe
<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Arctic skua/ parasitic jaeger	Schmarotzerraubmöwe
<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	great skua	Skua
<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Arctic tern	Küstenseeschwalbe
<i>Uria lomvia</i>	Brünnich's guillemot / thick-billed murre	Dickschnabellumme
<i>Pagophila eburnea</i>	ivory gull	Elfenbeinmöwe

Wildlife List – Waterbirds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH
<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	pink-footed goose	Kurzschnabelgans
<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	barnacle goose	Weißwangengans
<i>Calidris maritima</i>	purple sandpiper	Meerstrandläufer
<i>Branta bernicla</i>	brant goose	Ringelgans
<i>Gavia stellata</i>	red-throated diver/loon	Sterntaucher
<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	common eider	Eiderente
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	common ringed plover	Sandregenpfeifer
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	ruddy turnstone	Steinwälzer

Wildlife List — Landbirds

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH
<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	snow bunting	Schneeammer





eBird

Thanks to Enzo's efforts combined with yours, we recorded around 17 different bird species during 12 surveys (checklists).

The most numerous species were the northern fulmar, with 106 individuals observed, followed by the black-legged kittiwake, with 102 individuals.

You can review these observations by joining our [Trip Report](#) for this voyage.

Wildlife List — Flora



Wildlife List — Flora

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH	DEUTSCH
<i>Flavocetraria cucullata</i>	curled snow lichen	Kapuzenflechte
<i>Bistorta vivipara</i>	alpine bistort	Knöllchen-Knöterich
<i>Cerastium arcticum</i>	arctic mouse-ear chickweed	Arktisches hornkraut
<i>Saxifraga cernua</i>	drooping saxifrage	Nickende Steinbrech
<i>Pedicularis hirsuta</i>	hairy lousewort	Behaartes läusekraut
<i>Xanthoria spp.</i>	elegant sunburst lichen	Zierliche Gelbflechte
	feather mosses	
<i>Silene acaulis</i>	moss campion	Stengelloses leimkraut
<i>Saxifraga oppositifolia</i>	purple saxifrage	Roter steinbrech
<i>Saxifraga cespitosa</i>	tufted saxifrage	Rasen-steinbrech
<i>Carex spp.</i>	sedge	
<i>Alaria esculenta</i>	winged kelp	
<i>Fucus vesiculosus</i>	vesicled rockweed	
<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>	marsh saxifrage	Moor-steinbrech
<i>Dryas octopetala</i>	mountain avens	Silberwurz
<i>Oxyria digyna</i>	mountain sorrel	Alpen-säuerling
<i>Cochlearia officinalis</i>	scurvy-grass	Gebräuchliches Löffelkraut



iNaturalist

iNaturalist

Thanks to your efforts, we recorded over 40 opportunistic observations representing over 29 different species.

Summer is drawing to a close in the Arctic, but plants are still in bloom. They represent around 40% of our observations, followed by molluscs, other animals, and fungi.

By sharing your data on iNaturalist, you are contributing to a global, open-access database that fuels scientific research and conservation monitoring. These records are vital tools for researchers tracking species distribution and assessing ecosystem health.

You can view the project and upload your observations from our voyage by [clicking here](#).





In Summary

Our summertime expedition circumnavigating Svalbard was a remarkable journey into some of the most remote waters of the Arctic. Our itinerary allowed us to collect valuable data regarding terrestrial flora, fauna, and marine ecosystems, including a key encounter with the largest animal on the planet, the blue whale. Our science boat outings were very popular, together with our lectures and workshops, helping to bridge the gap between science and general knowledge on the pristine and remote ecosystem we visited.

What data?	How much data?
iNaturalist	40+ observations, 29 species
eBird	12 checklists, 17 species
HappyWhale	1 submission
CTD profiles	6 submissions

Thank You!

The MS Fram Science and Education Team extends heartfelt thanks for choosing HX Expeditions to explore the Svalbard archipelago during summertime. Your participation not only supports the ongoing work of researchers but also enables them to join our voyages, carry out meaningful studies, and access essential logistical resources that are often difficult to secure.

We are deeply appreciative of your genuine curiosity and shared enthusiasm for the natural world—from birds and marine mammals to flowers, lichens, mosses, and even the microscopic life found in a drop of water.

It was a true joy to exchange ideas, reflect on history over coffee, and marvel together at the diverse ecosystems we encountered. We hope this journey will remain among your most treasured memories.





THX

**Thanks for your
participation!**