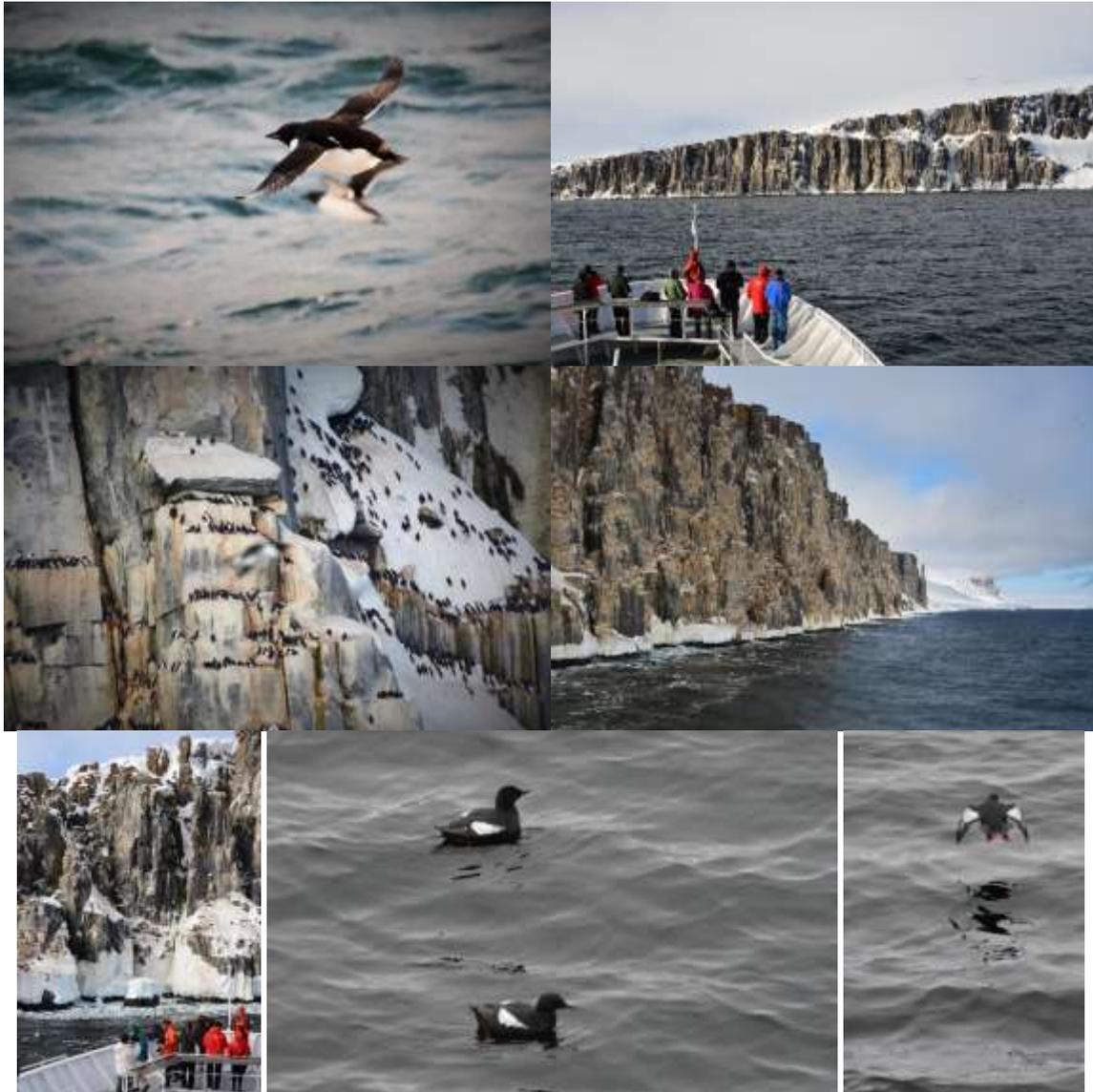


*Joel:*

**Sunday 31 May 2015**

The day started much like any other, with Lucho's voice over the loudspeaker. I rolled straight over back to sleep while Roger and Sylvia diligently arose to do a spot of bird watching at a place called Kapp Fanshawe which is near Lomfjorden.





After the usual spread we began exploring for wildlife. There were no so-called 'long' hikes today or zodiac cruises. We were a ship on a mission. We explored a few fjords in the island Nordaustlandet, to the north-east of Spitsbergen, and managed to sight a polar bear with two cubs ahead, and another two polar bears off the starboard side of the ship. However, the bears were only visible through binoculars, and even then the most you could make out was an indistinct speck with two slightly smaller specks behind it. We stayed there for most of the afternoon but alas, the bears did not deign to come any closer to the ship. This stop provided lots of opportunity for book reading next to the snorers in the library.



At 4 in the afternoon an announcement was made telling us that there was BBQ lobster sandwiches and champagne on the back deck. Sylvia and I obviously chose to hit the

gym instead; Roger was not so easily drawn away. I have a sneaking suspicion that he may have claimed our sandwiches and champagne as well, although I can't prove anything.

After another amazing dinner we headed to the bridge, as rumour had it that we were aiming to cross the 81<sup>st</sup> parallel. We reached the edge of the arctic ice pack and it stretched as far as you could see. It was amazing to see so much ice and know that it is all adrift out there.

Unfortunately the ice pack did not allow us to make it to the 81<sup>st</sup> parallel, so the ship was beginning to turn when Eric, the photographer, spotted a bear! So we forged ahead. We came within probably 20 metres of the bear, and watched amazed as it hauled a seal out of a cave and began to eat. He was surrounded by Ivory Gulls, which are apparently very rare. I have to be honest, they looked quite similar to the gulls I've seen at the dump in Rotorua, but then I've never claimed to be a bird watcher. We stayed for at least an hour and the whole time all that could be heard was the click of camera shutters. It was truly an amazing experience.



Never being ones to pass up on any opportunity, Roger and I raced back to our cabins just as we were leaving and jumped into our togs. What better place to get a photo in your togs than at the northern most point of the voyage with a polar bear and the arctic ice pack in the background.

