Eagle-Eye Tours



Grand Newfoundland birding tour 2016

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This past June, a fun-loving group of nine birders (led by Jared Clarke & Jody Allair) set off for an adventure at the eastern edge of North America. A brand new offering, our Grand Newfoundland birding tour presents a unique blend of marvellous birding and spectacular scenery in a land steeped in history and culture. This tour was also our annual Bird Studies Canada (BSC) members' trip, with a portion of the proceeds donated to help support the conservation and education work of this great organization. Newfoundland is home to spectacular seabird colonies, lush boreal forests, abundant wetlands and even the world's southernmost sub-arctic tundra – all of which our group explored during their travels. Highlights were many and included seeing thousands of Atlantic Puffins, Northern Gannets and many other seabirds; finding an elusive Black-backed Woodpecker tending to a nest full of young; and spotting northern songbirds such as Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, "Newfoundland" Red Crossbill and 14 species of warbler. Other wildlife such as whales, moose, and caribou were enjoyed along the way, as were an array of butterflies, orchids and other wildflowers. And all this set against the stunning scenery for which Newfoundland is so well known.



Newfoundland birding group 2016

Our tour began in St. John's – a quaint, scenic city that also claims to be the oldest in North America. Here our group visited the historic harbour, which has been used by fishing boats since the early 1500's.



Atlantic Puffins © Jared Clarke

A huge highlight was our boat tour to the **Witless Bay Ecological Reserve**, where we experienced (not just "saw"!) North America's largest colony of **Atlantic Puffins**. The unique bills and equally colourful antics of Newfoundland's provincial bird never fail to entertain.



Common Murres © Jared Clarke

However, Puffins only account for some of the 4.5 million seabirds that nest in the reserve during the summer. A huge part of this spectacle is the incredible swarms of Common Murre that make their home on the islands' rocky cliffs. *See the amazing density of birds for yourself in Jody Allair's video here:*



Northern Fulmar

Not all the birds are so easy to see, of course. **Northern Fulmar** is a scarce breeder along Newfoundland's coast, but we found one pair checking out the cliffs on Gull Island. What a treat to

have one of them circle around behind our boat!



Boreal Chickadee © Jared Clarke

The thick coniferous forests of the Avalon Peninsula are home to many species of northern boreal songbirds. We enjoyed great looks at several groups of **Boreal Chickadee** – a long-awaited "lifer" for several participants.



Short-tailed Swallowtail © Jared Clarke

Of course, there were many non-bird highlights as well. Among them were several encounters with

Short-tailed Swallowtail – a beautiful butterfly with a very restricted range. Newfoundland's coastal headlands are one of the few places they can be found.



Short Eared Owl © Jared Clarke

We spent a full morning exploring the world's southernmost sub-arctic tundra. Not only was the beautiful, stark landscape a big hit with our group but so were our encounters with Willow Ptarmigan, Rough-legged Hawk, and several Woodland Caribou! Guests especially enjoyed watching two **Short-eared Owls** hunting right alongside the road.



Northern Gannet © Jared Clarke

Northern Gannets are among the most majestic seabirds in the world. We enjoyed stunning views at **Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve**, where more than 30,000 of them nest atop a spectacular sea stack and adjoining cliffs. They are joined by thousands of **Black-legged Kittiwake**, both **Common and Thick-billed Murre**, and dozens of **Razorbill** – all of which put in an appearance for us. *Check out Jody Allair's video of the Gannet colony in the fog:*



Gray Jay © Jared Clarke

Leaving the Avalon Peninsula behind, we started west across the island. Our first stop was in **Terra Nova National Park**, where we explored the sheltered coves, thick boreal forests and abundant wetlands that the park is famous for. Highlights included several family groups of curious **Gray Jays**, the endemic "percna" race of **Red Crossbill**, a **Spruce Grouse** nearly walking over Jared's foot, and the very uncommon Jutta Arctic butterfly – among many others.



Atlantic Salmon © Jared Clarke

No visit to central Newfoundland is complete without seeing the mighty Exploits River. Here we took time to learn about the incredible life cycle of Atlantic Salmon, which traverse the province's rivers to spawn every summer.



Bonne Bay © Jared Clarke

The last few days of our adventure were spent in **Gros Morne National Park** – an incredibly beautiful and wild place, as well as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The beautiful landscapes, more varied forests, and stunning Long Range Mountains provide a very different setting than we had experienced anywhere else on the island thus far.



Orchids © Jared Clarke

We encountered eight species of orchid during our tour, including these stunning examples. (Clockwise from upper left: Pink Ladyslipper Cypripedium acaule, Showy Ladyslipper Cypripedium reginae, Tall Northern Green Orchid Platanthera huronensis; and Dragonsmouth Orchid Arethusa bulbosa).



Western Brook Pond © Jared Clarke

Another big highlight was our boat tour of Western Brook Pond - an ancient landlocked fjord that is a pinnacle of the park's amazing scenery. Our hike took us through forests and over bogs to this

beautiful place – with lots of birds and wildflowers along the way. Watch a short clip of our boat tour through the fjord:



Newfoundland Birding group

It was a fantastic trip that included visits to many island habitats, an incredible array of birds and wildlife, amazing scenery, and loads of fun. Participant highlights ranged from seeing thousands of seabirds to the tiniest of orchids, and stunning vistas to quaint fishing villages. Even the charming people and wonderful food made the list of favourite experiences. Be sure to join us next time and experience it for yourself!