



Grand Newfoundland Birding Tour Trip Report (Jun 6 - 17, 2022)

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Our Newfoundland birding family photographed at Western Brook Pond, Gros Morne, NL

Day 1 - JUNE 6 Our intrepid group of travelers met for supper in St. John's to embark on a tour of the beautiful island of Newfoundland with 10 full days of birding. Our itinerary was to bird St. John's and surrounding area, Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, Southeast Avalon Peninsula, Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve, Terra Nova National Park, Central Newfoundland, and Gros Morne National Park. **Day 2 - June 7** Our first birding stop was just on the outskirts of St. John's. A leisurely stroll through boreal forest around Goulds produced many of the common residents including Song, Swamp, Fox and White-throated sparrows, as well as several newly arrived warblers like Yellow-rumped, Yellow, Black-and-white, American Redstart and Northern Waterthrush. The latter, usually a skulky bird, sat out in an exposed snag and sang for the group. We even encountered both Red and White-winged crossbills with great views. A fantastic start to the tour. A special treat on the way to lunch was a quick stop at a Great Horned Owl nest that had two downy chicks and one adult standing guard.



Black-and-white Warbler © Yousif Attia



White-winged Crossbill © Yousif Attia

The afternoon was a stark contrast in birding style as we boarded a vessel out of Bay Bulls to explore the protected islands in the Witless Bag Ecological Reserve. It was a bit windy and the water was moderately turbulent, but that didn't stop us from heading to the famous Green Island. First, Black Guillemots and Black-legged Kittiwakes and began to appear here and there. Soon after, small flocks of Common Murre and Atlantic Puffin started to stream by. Then there were more, and then more,

and before we knew it, we were on the doorstep of the second largest puffin breeding colony in the world! Words could hardly explain, and photos do no justice. A few Razorbills were spotted, and hidden among the Common Murres, were a small number of Thick-billed. It was a spectacle that left everyone in awe - and that was the first day!



Each speck is either an Atlantic Puffin or a Common Murre © Yousif Attia



Atlantic Puffin © Yousif Attia



Atlantic Puffins at nest burrows © Yousif Attia



Razorbills © Yousif Attia

Day 3 - June 8 Today was spent visiting various locations in and around St. John's. Things were off to a good start when we found a Laughing Gull from our hotel, a somewhat rare bird for the region.



This Laughing Gull (flying) was an unexpected treat right behind our hotel! © Yousif Attia

St. John's is a well-birded hub for rarities, especially Eurasian species. We checked in on a long-staying Pink-footed Goose and spent time appreciating other water loving species like Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Ring-billed Gull and Common Tern. Mallards and American Black Ducks were the most common waterfowl but we also saw Ring-necked Ducks and Hooded Mergansers.



Pink-footed Goose © Yousif Attia

We worked our way to Cape Spear, the most easterly point of land in North America. In the songbird department, we noted Savannah Sparrows and were treated to repeated flight and song displays of

American Pipits over the cliffs back dropped by the raging Atlantic Ocean. In the distance, our first Northern Gannet loafed by. We worked our way to the scenic village of Pedder Bay and birded some more trails and ponds adding species like Osprey, Spotted Sandpiper, Tree Swallow and Common Loon.



Osprey © Yousif Attia

Day 4 - June 9 It was time to leave St. John's, but not before spotting a Coyote on the outskirts of town! We worked our way south along the Irish Loop passing through several iconic towns and finding birds as we went. At St. Michael, we scoped the distant cliffs overlooking the southern Witless Bay Islands. The highlight was a small colony of nesting Northern Fulmar among the other alcids we had close up views of yesterday. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Golden-crowned Kinglets called from the woods nearby. Our next stop was the town of Renew, which has historically proved to be a migrant trap. An active feeder in town gave us great looks at Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Purple Finch, four species of sparrow and Red Crossbills. We also heard a singing Northern Mockingbird, which was a local rarity found by others a few days ago. A highlight for our group was pointing out a Boreal Chickadee to the home owner, which was new for her already impressive yard list.



Red Crossbills at feeder © Yousif Attia

Onward to Cape Race where we lucked into a male Willow Ptarmigan near the end of the road. The ptarmigan posed for scope views and a Common Loon flew over our heads, seemingly coming from nowhere. We pressed on to Cape Race where it was very windy but very scenic. We wandered below the lighthouse and discovered the wings and feathers of Leach's Storm-Petrels that likely had likely collided with the Lighthouse during a weather event. We ended the day in the lovely town of Trepassey. **Day 5 - June 10** This morning was a bit damp but off to a good start when we received word of an Eastern Kingbird in town. It wasn't long before we tracked it down this uncommon bird for Newfoundland. As we worked our way west, we noticed it was very foggy. It was so foggy that we could hardly see the Cape Pine Lighthouse until we were almost underneath it. On our way out, we spotted another Willow Ptarmigan running from the road and into the foggy tundra. We decided to backtrack to Trepassey where the lower elevation was somehow less foggy. We received yet another report of a Whimbrel of the Eurasian subspecies earlier that morning. We searched but we couldn't track it down. We did however spot a distant group of our first White-winged Scoters. We went back west to see if fog had lifted, which it unfortunately hadn't. Regardless, we pushed on to St. Schotts and were rewarded with our second Short-eared Owl. St. Schotts itself was very windy and cool but just enough fog had lifted to allow us to see a male Black Scoter and a male Common Eider out on the water. We had lunch in St. Schotts while Northern Gannets dove in the bay - a nice precursor for the following days adventure.



Birding the Avalon Peninsula © Yousif Attia

After lunch, we drove towards the town of Branch. We received word that a Snowy Egret, a rare bird in Newfoundland was reported in the area a couple of days ago. With a bit of time to spare, we decided to do a quick search of the estuary, and sure enough, we located the little fella! After supper we continued on a short drive to Saint Bride's for the night.



Snowy Egret © Yousif Attia

Day 6 - June 11 We were up bright and early on our way to the famous Cape St. Mary's eco reserve. It was another foggy morning and we spotted yet another Short-eared Owl hunting near the

road. Our third in as many days! We arrived to Cape St, Mary's and were escorted by visitor center staff to Bird Rock, where the colony is at its densest. This location represents one of the largest Northern Gannet breeding colonies in the world. The fog was so thick that we still couldn't see any birds, even though we could hear them, and even smell them! As we neared the very high cliff ledge, we took in the spectacle. Hundreds of adult gannets, Black-legged Kittiwakes and Common Murres were flying around frantically moving between the water, nearby grassy hillsides, and their nests collecting nest material. Eventually, the fog began to lift revealing even more cliffs full of birds. We moved over to another viewpoint where we scoped a couple of distant Great Cormorants as well as more Thick-billed Murres, Razorbills, and Black Guillemots. It was hard to tear ourselves away from this paradise but eventually we meandered back picking up some of the few songbirds that were around like Savannah Sparrow, Horned Lark, and American Pipit.



Northern Gannet © Yousif Attia



Common Murres © Yousif Attia

The afternoon was reserved for covering ground as we left the Avalon and headed north towards the Terra Nova National Park area. We made one well-timed rest stop at Arnold's Cove where a couple of Black-bellied Plovers were reported the day previous. Sure enough, we found the plovers, restocked up on coffee and we were on the road again. While driving, we spotted a Merlin perched on the side of the road, and stopped to enjoy this uncommon treat. We arrived to our hotel at Charlottetown where we would spend the following two nights. **Day 7 - June 12** An early morning crew zipped over to Sandy Pond for some pre-breakfast birding. Bird song was full on! Many colorful warblers were noted including Magnolia and Black-throated Green. We also heard a distant Olive-sided Flycatcher and had a frustratingly brief flyby of a Black-backed Woodpecker. Our first Greater Yellowlegs for the trip was somewhat unexpected. After breakfast we went on a lovely hike on the Ochre Hill Trail. Our target birds here were super cooperative! We had close views of the uber-bright "Yellow" Palm Warbler and a family of shy Canada Jays.



“Yellow” Palm Warbler © Yousif Attia

The weather really started warming up as we had our picnic lunch. Despite the heat, we went for a leisurely stroll where we happened upon a male Spruce Grouse that was finishing up a dust bath. This species is never guaranteed and we had walkaway looks at it. Another highlight on this trail was a Jutta Arctic butterfly, one of the most cryptic families. Later in the day, some of the group went out after supper to the scenic Blue Hill lookout.



Jutta Arctic Butterfly © Yousif Attia

Day 8 - June 13 This morning we explored some of the woods near our well positioned hotel. We

focussed our efforts on getting improved looks at some secretive denizens of the forest including Boreal Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Golden-crowned Kinglet. We walked the first 1.5 km of the trail to Dunphy's Pond in search of more boreal specialties. The highlight here was excellent views at a Black-backed Woodpecker and improved looks at Wilson's Warbler.



Boreal Chickadee © Yousif Attia



Our group shortly after getting our best looks at Black-backed Woodpecker at Terra Nova N.P. © Yousif Attia

Terra Nova National Park did not disappoint, but it was time to move on and see more of this beautiful province. We took the TCH (Trans Canada Highway) north to the now famous town of Gander for lunch. We made a quick pit stop at the airport, where the people of this town showed the world just how legendary the hospitality of Newfoundlanders can be! During the catastrophic events of 9/11 in 2001, this town accommodated for nearly 7000 displaced travelers. After lunch we pressed on towards Grand Falls-Windsor. A well-timed stop along the way in some boreal park produced incredible looks at a Northern Goshawk nest, and a fleeting flyby of a few Rusty Blackbirds. Both are high quality northern species that are becoming increasingly difficult to come across, so we were happy with our experience. We would overnight at Grand Falls-Windsor.



Respectfully observing a Northern Goshawk nest through a spotting scope was one of the highlights of our trip © Yousif Attia



We encountered several Canada Jays at Terra Nova N.P. © Yousif Attia

Day 9 - June 14 Our first stop this morning was a long birding session at Corduroy Brook Wetlands. This well maintained park was very birdy. We had our first encounter with Mourning Warbler, Alder Flycatcher, Tennessee Warbler, and Ovenbird. Other highlights included looks at Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Warbler, and several Lincoln's Sparrows. The afternoon was spent driving through Deer Lake to Rocky Harbour, which would be our destination for the coming two nights. Upon arrival, we were serenaded by our first Swainson's Thrushes of the trip and we had our first two Caspian Terns fly over our table during supper! Surely a good omen for things to come.



*Alder Flycatchers seemed almost absent on our travels but Central Newfoundland is a stronghold
© Yousif Attia*



Ovenbird © Yousif Attia

Day 10 - June 15 We started the morning with a short bit of birding at Green Point campground. We had enjoyable looks at many of the boreal warblers that seemed to be more abundant on the western side of the island. The show-stealers however, were a couple of seemingly tame, eye level Pine Grosbeaks. Next, we made our way to the trailhead to the famous Western Brook Pond. The trail was popular, busy with people, but despite that, it was surprisingly productive for birds. Our prize here was a Hairy Woodpecker visiting a nest cavity just off the main trail!



Pine Grosbeak © Yousif Attia



Hairy Woodpecker © Yousif Attia

We enjoyed a picnic lunch before embarking on a boat trip to enjoy the iconic scenery of Western Brook Pond. The weather was beautiful and the views were truly out of this world. While the pond itself is not known to be attractive for birds, we did spot a Caspian Tern making the rounds. We stopped at the Hairy Woodpecker nest on the walk out, where a Downy Woodpecker decided to join in and offer a comparison for us. We had a bit of time for some exploring, which proved to be a good idea when we came across a loose Bank Swallow Colony near Broom Point.



Scenery at Western Brook Pond, Gros Morne. © Yousif Attia



Bank Swallow © Yousif Attia

Day 11 - June 16 Our final full birding day was reserved for Gros Morne, and we started the day with a few catch up birds including Red-eyed and Blue-headed vireos. One target species that had thus far evaded us was remedied when we heard a small flock of Evening Grosbeaks was while driving out of Lomond Picnic Area. These enigmatic finches can be tricky to find and are not always reliable.



Evening Grosbeaks © Yousif Attia

After a lovely seafood lunch at Trout River, we switched gears to learn about the incredible geology that this area is known for. We spent a good amount of time at the Discovery Centre in preparation for the location we would visit next, known as the Tablelands. This is one of the few places on earth where you can walk on exposed mantle, a layer normally found well below the earth's crust. Exploring the Tablelands did not disappoint and we found some very cool pitcher plants near the parking area to boot. The most excitement was just as we were leaving, when a bull Caribou was spotted across from the parking area, as if to bid us farewell. We had expected to come across one of these on the Avalon, but were disadvantaged by the fog. This eleventh-hour sighting lifted our spirits and really put a nice bow on our memory of this action-packed tour. We scored another moose on the drive to Deer Lake. Our last supper was bitter-sweet since we had so many great experiences to review, but also knew that our time together in this beautiful part of the world was coming to an end.



Black-legged Kittiwake © Yousif Attia

Day 12 - June 17 Today was a travel day for most of our group. A total of 111 species of birds were detected including Razorbill, Northern Fulmar, Black-legged Kittiwake, Atlantic Puffin, Boreal Chickadee, Northern Gannet, and Thick-billed Murre. Mammals included: Woodland Caribou, Moose, Coyote, Minke Whale, Harbour Seal and more. Other critters included butterflies like Jutta Arctic and a few carnivorous plants. Thank you to everyone in the group for their contributions, sharp eyes, and easy-going attitude. This, combined with the landscape, wildlife, geology, and people of this unique province made for a truly unforgettable trip. eBird Trip Report:

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