Eagle-Eye Tours



Grand Newfoundland Trip Report (Jun 13 - 24, 2024)

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We spent 12 days exploring Newfoundland's scenic and historic landscapes. The weather was incredible and uncharacteristic for the Island—no rain, little fog, and warm conditions. Starting in St. John’s, we worked our way along the coast of the Avalon Peninsula before continuing on to Terra Nova National Park. We then made a slight detour for a boat trip out of Trinity to look for the continuing Steller’s Sea Eagle, which obliged with incredible views!! After exploring Terra Nova National Park, we continued West, making stops in Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor before arriving in Rocky Harbour. From here we ventured out to explore the unique landscape of Gros Morne National Park wrapping up our trip with unforgettable experiences in Newfoundland’s diverse and beautiful environments.

Day 1: Arrive in St. John’s

Night one we met in the hotel lobby before heading downtown to get to know each other over dinner.

Day 2: Goulds, Bidgood Park, Witless Bay

We started the tour on a cloudless, warm day in St. John’s! After a hearty breakfast, we took a short drive south to look for songbirds at Cochrane Pond Road. The chatter of White-winged Crossbills filled the sky, and loud harsh songs of Northern Waterthrush filled the spruce forest. We got great views of Wilson’s Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, and Yellow-rumped Warbler, but the real highlight came in the form of a Great-horned Owl Nest! While we could only hear the adults, the newly fledged young sat out in the open in the nest! We also got great looks at Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Mourning Warbler, and brief looks at Pine Grosbeak. We moved on to Bidgood Park, just outside of Goulds, where we picked up American Bittern, Swamp Sparrow, and American Redstart over a picnic lunch. After lunch, we drove another 20 minutes south to overlook Witless Bay, where the

clear conditions allowed us to see Gull and Green Island, along with dozens of kittiwakes, and even a couple of Arctic Terns! But the real highlight was to come. We arrived in Bay Bulls at O'briens Puffins and Whales Tours and took a boat out to the Islands to get closer looks at one of the largest seabird colonies in the world. On the way out, we got a lesson in geography and local music from the boat crew.



Thick-billed Murre © Tim Lucas

Arriving to the Islands, impressive swarms of murres, puffins, and Razorbill streamed to and from their nests. Our captain maneuvered the boat to get close, and we even got looks at Thick-billed Murre amongst the Common Murre. After a perfect afternoon on the water we made our way back to St. John's for dinner at the historic Celtic Hearth.



Atlantic Puffins © Tim Lucas

Day 3: Cape Spear, Signal Hill, St. John’s

We started the day with a visit to Cape Spear, the easternmost point of land in North America, and home to Newfoundland’s oldest lighthouse. The weather was clear, providing incredible visibility all the way back to St. John’s and to the horizon of the ocean. Despite the clarity, there was enough fog to create a moody and atmospheric scene. At Cape Spear, a few of us had the thrill of seeing two humpback whales and dolphins offshore, as well as Northern Gannets and an American Pipit. Next, we headed to Signal Hill, where we explored the rich history and diverse wildlife of the area. Bird highlights at Signal Hill included Yellow Warblers, Common Grackles, and Purple Finches. Here we enjoyed a picnic lunch amidst the beautiful surroundings.



Signal Hill © Tim Lucas

In the afternoon, we ventured into downtown St. John's in search of rare bird species. Our first success was spotting a Pink-footed Goose at Burton's Pond, where we also had great views of Red Crossbills. At Kenny's Pond, although our search for a Tufted Duck was unsuccessful, we had excellent looks at Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees, along with a lone Ring-necked Duck that had given us false hope. We finished the day at a local favorite Italian restaurant, Piatto, enjoying a delicious meal to wrap up a day full of memorable experiences.

Day 4 - St. Johns to Trepassey

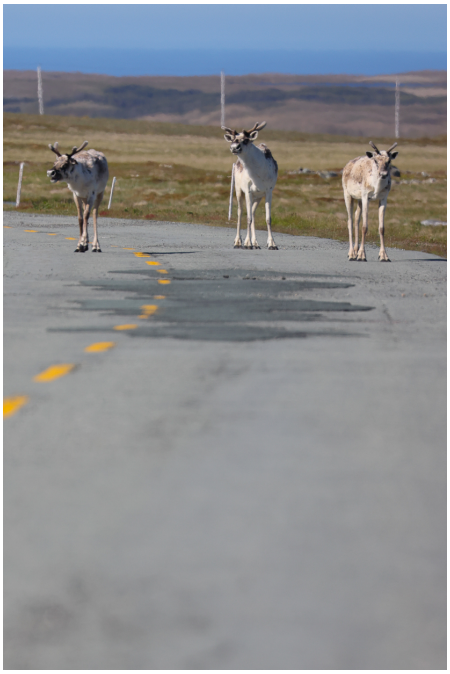
On Day 4 of our Newfoundland tour, our first stop was the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, where we were treated to the stunning sight of Ship Island. Here, we marveled at the rich avian life, spotting Northern Fulmar, Kittiwakes, and an abundance of charming Puffins. Next, we ventured to La Manche, a picturesque area where we picked up Northern Waterthrush and a striking Black-throated Green Warbler. A particular highlight was our close encounter with a Fox Sparrow, offering us a great opportunity for observation and photography. Continuing our journey, we made our way to Cape Broyle and Renews. At Renews, a Spotted Sandpiper captivated our attention, and we were fortunate to compare Arctic and Common Terns. We then enjoyed a leisurely lunch at Portugal Cove South, where we were thrilled to spot an American Bittern as we ate before driving down to the Cape Race Lighthouse, spotting Horned Larks and Northern Harrier, Scoters, and distant Manx Shearwaters. Our day concluded at the Edge of the Avalon Inn, where we were treated to live music and an amazing meal together, providing a perfect end to a day filled with diverse and memorable experiences.



Cape Race Models © Tim Lucas

Day 5 - Trepassey, St. Schott's, St. Vincent's, Point La Haye, St. Brides

We started the day off at Lower Trepassey, where we picked up Red-throated Loon, Osprey on a nest and a stunning look at a place with a storied history. We then made our way to St. Schott's, being sure to scan the barrens for signs of Willow Ptarmigan and Caribou. It wasn't long before we spotted a herd of Woodland Caribou in the distance, including a large stag!



Woodland Caribou © Tim Lucas

Before we packed up, another small group crested the ridge in front of us, made their way onto the road and started towards us, allowing for awesome views and photo opportunities! We continued on to scenic St. Schotts, where we scored our first Common Eider, Sooty Shearwaters, Short-tailed Swallowtails and beautiful looks at pairs of both Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks!



St Shotts © Tim Lucas



Group at St Shotts © Tim Lucas

Leaving St. Schotts, we drove along the beautiful coastline, stopping in Peters River, and then just across the causeway at St. Vincent's beach, where Humpback Whales were putting on a show just off the beach. We ate lunch here and continued on our scenic drive, stopping in Point La Haye and finally at Capeway Inn in St. Brides to stay the night.

Day 6 - Cape St. Mary's, Castle Hill

The weather cooperated again this morning and gave us clear skies, perfect temperature, and a light north breeze. After breakfast and friendly faces at Da Birds Eye, we headed down to Cape St. Mary's to check out the seabird spectacle there.



Cape St Marys © Tim Lucas



Cape St Mary's View © Adam Timpf

On the way down, we spotted a huge target for us: Willow Ptarmigan. Two counter-singing males and a female! We spent some time photographing them within view of the Cape St. Mary's Visitor's Centre.



Willow Ptarmigan © Tim Lucas

After brief hellos at the Visitor Centre, we made the short walk across stunning terrain to arrive at the Gannet colony at Bird Rock. This colony is a must visit for anyone interested in seabirds, and particularly photography. Gannets swirled around us and nested just feet from the ends of our

camera lenses. Common Murre lined the cliffs and we even managed to pick out a Thick-billed Murre amongst the Commons. A group of Gray Seals and our only Great Cormorants were other highlights here.



Gray Seals © Tim Lucas

After a few hours photographing the seabirds we trekked back and headed on towards Placentia. At Placentia we made a stop at Castle Hill National Historic Site and had a picnic lunch, checked out the exhibits, and made our way up to the old fort that overlooks the town and harbour. From there we had a long drive to our motel at Clode Sound.

Day 7 - Trinity, Ochre Hill Lookout

Today we were determined to try for the long-staying Steller's Sea Eagle. We started our day with an amazing breakfast at the motel that included homemade Partridge Berry jam! After breakfast, we packed up and headed East towards Trinity. We arrived in Trinity and checked into Sea of Whales Adventures, who offer boat tours of Trinity Bay and surrounding areas. After donning our survival suits we headed out on the water, where we were greeted by dozens of Black Guillemots, fair weather and fair seas! Arctic Terns made passes by our boat and we caught glimpses of brand new Herring Gull chicks! We made our way along the coastline in and out of coves in search of the Steller's Sea Eagle. Although many Bald Eagles were perched up on the rock, we were not having much luck with our target. Finally, on the South Shore of Cat Cove, our skipper spotted our target perched low in a Black Spruce.



Steller's Sea Eagle © Tim Lucas

<<StellersSeaEagleVideo-TimLucas>>
Amazingly the eagle allowed us to get very close, scratched her face and eyed us curiously. What an incredible experience! After getting back on land we spent a little bit of time exploring the historic town of Trinity before tiredly making our way back to the hotel.



Sandy Pond © Tim Lucas

We spent the evening in Terra Nova National Park, making sure to stop by the Ochre Hill Lookout to watch the sun set and to spot our first moose.

Day 8 - Terra Nova National Park

This morning we explored Terra Nova National Park. The weather was perfect and a little breeze kept the bugs at bay. Walking around Terra Nova we stumbled upon our first Magnolia Warblers, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Olive-sided Flycatchers. We ate lunch at the Terra Nova Visitor's Centre before stopping at Treytown to pick up Caspian Tern. We briefly stopped in Gander for fuel, refreshments and ice cream before making the drive to our Hotel in Grand Falls-Windsor.

Day 9 - Corduroy Brook - Taylor Rd - Salmonid Interpretive Centre

We spent the morning birding Corduroy Brook Nature Trails just outside of Grand Falls-Windsor. Immediately we picked up great views of Ovenbird, American Redstart, Mourning Warbler, Alder Flycatcher and Lincoln Sparrow. On a hunch, we went off script and drove Taylor Rd., a gravel road south of town. Here we picked up our first Tennessee Warbler and had great looks at Yellow Palm Warbler! At the Salmonid Interpretation Centre we learned of the monumental efforts and techniques that have brought back the Atlantic Salmon numbers on the Exploits River, where we at lunch beside the salmon ladders. After lunch we started our drive east to arrive in Rocky Harbour for dinner, and headed to the motel.

Day 10 - Gros Morne National Park

We started the morning at Berry Hill, where we had great looks at Mourning and Tennessee Warblers. We even spotted a singing Blue-headed Vireo! Then it was time to make the hike to Western Brook Pond for our boat tour of this stunning pond.



Gros Morne Boat trip © Tim Lucas

We ate our lunch at the edge of the pond after the walk in and took in the scenery on the boat. After the tour we made our way to Parson's Pond, where a colony of Bank Swallows has established a stronghold. We then made the long drive back to the Hotel in Rocky Harbour for dinner at Java Jacks.



Rocky Harbour © Tim Lucas

Day 11 - Gros Morne, Tablelands

We spent our final full day in Newfoundland was spent exploring the south-eastern part of Gros Morne National Park. We started the morning at Norris Point, a stunning viewpoint overlooking the East Arm. At the Gros Morne Lookout, we added a very cooperative Philadelphia Vireo by the observation deck. At Lomond, we picked up Pine Grosbeak, Bay-breasted Warbler and a rare orchid called Striped Coral Root! We even got to hand feed Canada Jays! After leaving Lomond Trailhead, we had our final picnic lunch just down the road at Lomond Campground then headed off towards the Tablelands. At the Tablelands, we walked the serpentine route, where we spotted local plants like Sea Thrift and Alpine Catchfly and took in the alien-like scenery.



Tablelands © Tim Lucas

Our final stop was the Gros Morne Discovery Centre, where we learned of the geology, history, and culture of this unique and fascinating national park. Lastly, we made the drive to Deer Lake for dinner, a final wrap up, hugs, and goodbyes.



[Grand Newfoundland Birdwatching Tour species list (Jun 13 - 24, 2024)]