Eagle-Eye Tours



Grand Newfoundland Trip Report (Jun 16 - 27, 2024)

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This Newfoundland birding tour offers a remarkable diversity of spectacular scenery, a good chance at seeing iconic mammals like Moose & Caribou, plus a variety of seabirds and northern mainland birds. We got to see some of the fabulous seabird colonies that dot the Avalon Peninsula, including thousands of Northern Gannets, Atlantic Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Common & Thick-billed Murres, as well as Razorbills and Black Guillemots. But who could have expected some of the surprises we would get during this trip. Great Moose & Caribou, an incredible show put on by the Humpback Whales at St Vincent's beach, and a most cooperative trail-side Lynx! Overall, we had 112 species of birds, including a few write-ins to the list, the most significant one, of course, the unforgettable Steller's Sea Eagle!!

Day 1 – June 16

Everyone arrived safely in St. John's, all had come at least a day in advance so that they could familiarize themselves with this beautiful tourist-oriented capital city. We met for dinner at The Cannery, the restaurant in the Hilton Garden Inn where we would staying the next four nights. It was apparent from the beginning that we had a great group of enthusiastic nature lovers.

Day 2 – June 17

The first two days of our tour were spent exploring birding sites in and around St John's and the northeast Avalon Peninsula. Our first stop was at the downtown Burton Pond where a Pink-footed Goose has hung out most of the last three years but it can sometimes be difficult to locate. We located the goose right away (on the shore with a bunch of Black Ducks and Mallards). We also spotted 5 American Wigeon in the pond, a Purple Finch was heard singing, and on the peak of a roof nearby stood a cute, half grown Herring Gull chick. Next, we headed out of town to the Cochrane Pond Road. A short walk here produced decent looks at our first of many Northern Waterthrushes,

Wilson's Warblers, Fox & Swamp Sparrows, while many other birds could be heard singing or were briefly seen including Wilson's Snipe, White-throated & Song Sparrows, Dark-eyed Junco, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blackpoll, Yellow & Yellow-rumped Warblers. Some of the better sightings, however, were an adult Great Horned Owl near its nest (but no young were obvious), and a flock of White-winged Crossbills flew over. Next, we did an extended walk on the Bidgood Park Trail where we added a Merlin, Common Yellowthroat, Black-and-white Warbler, Pine Siskin, and got better looks at many birds we'd heard or briefly seen earlier.



Great Horned Owl © Mitch Doucet

We'd made lunch arrangements at the Captain's Table in Mobile so we headed there for an excellent sit down lunch. On the way back to Witless Bay, we stopped at a small lake where a Ring-necked Duck had been seen on the way. The Ring-neck was still present and looking around we spotted an Eastern Kingbird along the shoreline – an unusual Newfoundland bird and our first write-in. It was a gorgeous day for the O'Brien boat tour that cruises along one of the largest islands in the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve – home to North America's largest Atlantic Puffin and second largest Common Murre colonies. On the way, we spotted many Black Guillemots (62 for the day) and 20 Northern Gannet were seen flying at a distance. Approaching the island, we were surrounded by flying and swimming Atlantic Puffins, Black-legged Kitiwakes & Common Murres and Razorbills. We cruised slowly along the island getting very close looks & photos of all of these, many Herring & a couple Black-backed Gulls that were obviously hanging around for an easy meal, and a single Thick-billed Murre was finally located among the Common Murres.



Atlantic Puffin © Mitch Doucet

Half way along the island, our show was interrupted when a distant whale spout was observed, so we raced off getting great looks at a mom which was IDed as H-432 by his fluke and baby Humpback (the youngster even showed off doing a complete breach).



Humpback Whale H432 © Mitch Doucet

On the way back, we sang some classic Newfie songs, some of the group got “screeched”, a Bald Eagle was spotted along the shore, and at the docks we added our first Common Terns, Spotted Sandpipers, and House Sparrows. It had been a full and very productive first full day. We headed

back with plenty of time to relax before walking a few blocks to the Yellowbelly Inn for dinner that evening.

Day 3 – June 18

After breakfast in the hotel, we'd be checking some of the better birding spots in town during the morning before heading out to Cape Spear National Historic Park, North America's most easterly point, in the afternoon. Rechecking Burton Pond, we had another look at the Pink-footed Goose but could not locate the Hooded Merganser or other specialties that have occurred here.



Pink-footed Goose © Mitch Doucet

We checked a downtown baseball field where a Black-headed Gull had been seen the day before but found only Ring-billed & Herring Gulls. Other areas that were checked included Long Pond, Kenny's Pond, and Stick Pond -- the latter good for our first Green-winged Teal, a Common Grackle, and a Red-winged Blackbird (another unusual write-in for the area). Off to Signal Hill where a female Hooded Merganser was found in Dead Man's Pond.



Hooded Merganser © Mitch Doucet

We spent some time atop Signal Hill admiring the views of St John's, the well-protected harbor, and ocean below us. Some took in the fort and other historic attractions of the area, others scanned the ocean where some far off Humpback spouts were seen, and locals told us they could see some Minke Whales but they disappeared before any of us got onto them. After looking over Quidi Vidi Lake where a couple Rusty Blackbirds flew by and the beach there, we hit a Subway for lunch before carrying on the Cape Spear. The views over the ocean here were superb and we would see many passing Gannets, some more Black Guillemots and Humpback Whales, but the hoped for shearwaters did not materialize. We did add some American Pipits among the rocks, and our first Savannah Sparrows here, and some of the group spent time checking out the area's attractions including the easternmost lighthouse in North America. That evening we walked to the Fish Exchange restaurant for dinner.



American Pipit © Mitch Doucet

Day 4 – June 19

Today we would head south on what is called the “Irish Loop” (Route 10) that encircles the southern end of the Avalon Peninsula. The scenery along this route is varied, from stark treeless tundra to lush forests, coastal headlands, seascapes and historic villages. A Killdeer was observed in a sandy cultivated field on the drive – the only one we would encounter on the trip! We stopped for another look over the pond near Mobile where the Ring-neck & kingbird had been seen; today we would find a Belted Kingfisher and Osprey here. We stopped at St Michael’s hoping to scope out some nesting Northern Fulmars among the many seabirds on the craggy cliffs of Ship Island but the distance and poor lighting prevented us from finding any. At La Manche Provincial Park, we stopped for restrooms and walked a portion of a trail -- heard only Ruffed Grouse and Hermit Thrush, plus good looks at our first Boreal Chickadees, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Black-throated Green Warblers. At Cape Broyle beach, we would find our first Greater Yellowlegs, two White-winged Scoters, and several Northern Pintails. On to Ferryland, where a nice sit down meal at the Tetley Tea Room was enjoyed by all. Near Renews, we had good comparison looks at a few Arctic Terns among a small colony of Common Terns.



Common Tern and Arctic Tern © Mitch Doucet

Before turning off to Cape Race, we stopped to look at three quite distant Caribou. We saw little new along the rather long gravel road to Cape Race (other than a fine collection of nicely crafted colorful miniature boats in a bay). At the Cape Race lighthouse, where the famous distress calls of the Titanic were received more than a hundred years ago, we enjoyed the some nice vistas over the ocean and spotted some Gannets, Guillemots, and a couple of American Pipits along the shoreline rocks. On to The Edge Of The Avalon Motel in Trepassey where we were greeted by our first Cedar Waxwings, relaxed for a spell, and dined that evening at the motel's fine restaurant.

Day 5 – June 20

Breakfast at the motel today would be at 7:30, so a few of us drove out to the lighthouse at the end of Powles Head and back, spotting a couple Snowshoe Hares, a Northern Flicker and getting some additional looks at birds we had seen before. After breakfast we made a fuel and washroom stop at St Mary's (spotting our first Canada Jay, Canada Geese, a couple of very close Caribou, and several Common Loons) before backtracking to take the road to Cape Pine.



Caribou © Mitch Doucet

Timing was on our side that morning, as a stop for a couple of very noisy territorial Greater Yellowlegs perched on hydro wires, led to at least 3 displaying Least Sandpipers that joined in the show. Further down the road, a large male moose jumped out of some roadside shrubs, a few Horned Larks were spotted along the roadside, several tiny Masked Shrews darted across the road, and finally the one we'd all been hoping to find – a pair of Willow Ptarmigans that ambled from the roadside giving us great looks.



Willow Ptarmigan © Mitch Doucet

It had got very windy by the time we got to the lighthouse and a few of the regular seabirds were spotted, but in the lee of the wind we located several Short-tailed Swallowtails -- a specialty butterfly of the area with a very restricted range outside of Newfoundland.



Short-tailed Swallowtails © Mitch Doucet

Excited with our morning's finds, we stopped at a former interpretive center in St Vincent where they allowed us inside to use the washrooms and to eat our bag lunches. But the day's excitement was just starting. On the nearby beach we found many people, all enjoying an amazing show put on by a group of at least 12 Humpback Whales so close to shore that it looked like people would have been getting sprayed if not for the brisk offshore breeze. Those with cameras took hundreds of photos as the whales were putting on a feeding show, constantly circling around and coming up occasionally to feed on capelin. After a while, it became obvious you just had to watch the gulls to know when the whales were going to surface on a group of capelin; large numbers of gulls would all fly to a spot and then a couple or more whales would surface with their gapes open. Looking at photos later, it appeared like some of the gulls were actually inside the gapes of the whales picking up capelin! Other photos showed large numbers of capelin leaping up as the whales surfaced. It was one of those spectacles one could easily most of the day watching, but we eventually needed to pull away as we had a long drive before we'd get to our destination for tonight.



Humpback Whale at St. Vincent © Mitch Doucet

St Vincent's had caused us to skip a couple of stops we would usually make that afternoon, but all thought it was more than worth it. We got to St Brides by 5:30, checked into the very nice Capeway Inn, and later walked over to Da Bird's Eye restaurant for a 6:30 dinner. It had been a fabulous day!

Day 6 – June 21

Today we'd have a fair bit of driving to do & we'd added a couple of extra stops, so we packed, had Breakfast at Da Bird's Eye at 7, and were off (but not before catching a quick look at a Gray Catbird singing from across the street – another unusual write in). Straight to the Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve where weather conditions were excellent for breath-takingly close views at one of the largest colonies of Northern Gannet in North America, as well as numerous other close-up Common Murres, Razorbills and Black-legged Kittiwakes (some with small chicks) on the steep cliffs and rocks below us, many only 10-15 yards/meters away!



Northern Gannet © Mitch Doucet

After a long haul north, we lunched at a Subway in Clarenville before proceeding northeast through the Bonavista Peninsula. Our next destination was Elliston, which prides itself as the “root cellar capital of the world” and where one can get up close to a large nesting colony of Atlantic Puffins (a few were standing around in the colony this afternoon but most were either in their burrows or were out to sea). We’d heard that a most unusual bird from Russia, the Steller’s Sea Eagle, had been seen just off the peninsula, so we had asked participants if they wanted to pay $100 for a special zodiac ride out with a chance of seeing it. Most were interested and we’d booked a 4 o’clock ride with Trinity Eco-Tours. The zodiac ride took us through spectacular cliffs, waterfalls, and exploring some secluded inlets and caves. At least 16 Bald Eagles were observed along the shorelines but it was looking like the Steller’s which had not been seen by the zodiac trip earlier in the day would elude us.



Bald Eagle © Mitch Doucet

Our last chance was in a bay near the town of Old Bonaventure, and there too only Bald Eagles were found, but as we were turning to leave someone spotted the Steller's high up on the cliff. It was hard to miss once you knew where it was, its gigantic yellow bill and distinctive markings very evident. Although we saw little else than a few puffins on the ride across the open sea back to Trinity, all were stoked to have had good looks at "the bird".



Steller's Sea-Eagle © Mitch Doucet

We had dinner at the Dock Marina restaurant in Trinity, and drove straight to the Clode Sound

Motel in Charlottetown arriving late, but still excited by what had proven to be another banner day.

Day 7 – June 22

We would spend the next day and a half in Terra Nova National Park, a park that has many nice trails, and splendid vistas overlooking rich boreal forests, as well as the sheltered waters of Clode Sound & Newman Sound. A few of us prowled around the motel grounds before a 7:30 breakfast at the motel, and we did a short walk nearby afterwards adding American Redstart, Purple Finch, Hairy Woodpecker, and some Pine Siskins. An extended walk around Sandy Pond yielded our first looks at Palm Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrow. We ate our bag lunches at the Newman Sound Campground and Day Use Area, where a bicyclist alerted us to some owls – indeed an adult Great Horned Owl and two fledged chicks were a nice find.



Fledged Great Horned Owl © Mitch Doucet

On the way up to the Ochre Hill lookout, a Spruce Grouse was flushed from the roadside but we were only able to get fleeting looks. The view from the lookout was spectacular, but a nearby Magnolia Warbler would not cooperate to give us decent looks. Some folks were a bit played out, so we dropped them off at the motel and carried on to Dumphy's Pond trail but it proved to be a bit too wet and it started to drizzle so the rest of us headed back as well. Dinner that evening at the motel was at 6:30.

Day 8 – June 23

Some of the group took a pre-breakfast drive to the Terra Nova town site this morning; a Caribou crossed the road near us, but there was little else of significance observed. Packed and off by shortly after 8, we headed back to Ochre Hill, this time to walk a portion of the trail. The walk was very productive yielding close up Olive-sided Flycatcher views, a family group of Canada Jays, superb looks at a male and female Black-backed Woodpecker, as well as a couple of Downy & Hairy Woodpeckers, Palm Warbler and Boreal Chickadee.



Olive-sided Flycatcher © Mitch Doucet



Black-backed Woodpecker © Mitch Doucet

At the Visitor's Centre we walked a portion of the Goowiddy trail but failed to find a Spruce Grouse that is often seen along this trail. After eating our bag lunches at the Centre we stopped at another great lookout in the park (Blue Hill) where we took some group photos, played around with another Magnolia Warbler, and tried to call in a singing Cape May Warbler.



Group photo at Blue Hill Lookout

Shortly after leaving the park, we stopped to scan some gulls and terns near the Culls Harbour bridge in Traytown and had nice scope looks at several Caspian Terns. After an hour's drive we reached Gander where we explored some nice deciduous forest near "the old town site" by the airport (Least Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo, and more American Redstarts and Black-throated Greens observed). On to Grand Falls where we checked into the Mount Peyton Hotel, rested up for a couple hours prior to dinner at the hotel at 6:30, and later were treated to a traditional "mug up" by a very fine young singer (Shannon Ivy) upstairs later that evening – she also quizzed us with some Newfie sayings which we usually failed to guess what they meant, as well as some of the strange place names which one finds throughout Newfoundland.

Day 9 – June 24

This morning we would wake up to the only foul weather we would experience on this trip, light to moderately heavy rain that persisted through much of the morning. After a leisurely breakfast in the motel, we drove out to some water treatment lagoons in town near Gorge Park where we saw as many ducks as we had in the previous 8 days combined. Most were Ring-necked Ducks (120), Black Ducks (60) & Mallards (25), with 20 Green-winged Teal, 4 Greater Scaup, a couple more American Wigeon, and our first Common Goldeneye, Wood Ducks & Blue-winged Teal (a write-in). After heading back to the motel to pack up, we stopped at the Salmon Interpretation Centre but they didn't show us as registered and the group didn't appear to be that keen to explore it so we carried on. Eventually the drizzle let up enough for us to walk a loop of the Corduroy Brook Nature Trail where we spotted over 20 American Toads along the trail, but birdlife along the trail was rather disappointing. After lunch at Subway we departed Grand Falls for the 3 hour drive to Gros Morne National Park. Inside the Park, we made one stop at a scenic overlook picking up our first singing Tennessee Warbler and realizing that the outer dual tire on one of the vans was flat. Checking into the Ocean View Hotel in Rocky Harbour the group had some time to unwind and/or take in the splendid ocean-side views (a couple of Rusty Blackbirds, 3 Mourning Doves, and some House Sparrows added around town). Ken & Mitch hit a nearby service station to fix the tire (amazing service as they dropped everything to blow up & check out the tire for leaks and never charged us a cent). We dined that evening across the street at the Fisherman's Landing Inn, a popular place that

served great food (a couple of us even had the lobster)!

Day 10 – June 25

Gros Morne National Park offers excellent opportunities for birding and wildlife viewing, but has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site largely due to its unique and globally important geological features. Pre-breakfast, a few of us headed out to walk some of the Berry Hill trail where we would hear some good birds including 2 nearby treetop Mourning Warblers, 3 Swainson's Thrushes and an Ovenbird, but try as we might we never got to see any. Settling for another Mourning Dove at the nearby Lobster Lighthouse and 3 Surf Scoters in the bay near the hotel, we made it back in time for a 7:30 breakfast in the hotel.



Surf Scoter © Mitch Doucet

We'd discovered that the tire's valve stem was still leaking so we dropped the van off before breakfast and they once again gave us amazing service - completely fixed at minimal cost by the time we went back after breakfast! Our boat tour into beautiful Western Brook Pond was scheduled for 12:30, and we didn't want to miss that so we pulled into the parking lot at 10:30. Some of us walked the 3 km trail into Western Brook Pond, but most took the $10 golf cart shuttle in. The walkers took their time getting a nice list of birds on the walk-in including a couple Alder Flycatchers, but as we neared to boat launch (actually right at the 0.5 km sign), a group of walkers that were in front of us were pointing at something in the brush alongside the trail. We hurried up to investigate and were amazed to see a calm, rather sleepy-eyed Lynx lying in full view right beside the trail. Luckily we had brought our radios along and the walkers were able to communicate to those at the boat launch the sighting. There was ample time for those who wanted to walk the ½ km back to see the Lynx and it cooperated staying put for most to see & photograph this iconic northern mammal.



Lynx © Mitch Doucet

We had a bag lunch while waiting to get on the boat, and although few birds occupy the waters of Western Brook Pond (a couple of Common Mergansers were our only sightings), the views as we sailed past towering cliffs and waterfalls were spectacular. Getting back to the vans with much of the afternoon spent, we wanted to check out a couple more spots in the northern part of Gros Morne Park. At Parsons Pond/Road we watched at least 100 Bank Swallows & a Belted Kingfisher going into nesting holes along a seaside cliff, and then spotted our first Common Eiders (3 females with large broods of small ducklings). One more stop at Broom Point was also productive getting great looks at a male Pine Grosbeak and a Tennessee Warbler, and along the waters edge we spotted at least 3 Great Cormorants with the regular Double-cresteds, and we got nice scope looks at several male Common Eiders in breeding plumage. Getting back to the hotel after 6, we had a shorter than normal rest before dinner in the motel at 7, but once again we felt it had been a banner day.



Tennessee Warbler © Mitch Doucet

Day 11 – June 26

Our last day in Gros Morne, a few of us got up to walk a section of the Berry Hill Pond trail, where we were finally able to hear a nearby Winter Wren but were unable to see it. After breakfast in the hotel, we headed south stopping at the James Callagham lookout (Red-eyed Vireo calling), walked a short section of the James Callagham trail (Ovenbird & Red-eyed Vireo), and we walked a portion of the Lomond River/Stuckless Pond trail where we got great looks at a Boreal Chickadee, heard another Cape May, had better looks at a Swainson's Thrush, a couple more cooperative Canada Jays, a couple more Pine Grosbeaks, and a highlight for many were the hundreds of Showy Lady Slippers in full bloom at this site. We also had a male Evening Grosbeak fly over here (one of 8 fly-overs seen while driving roads in the park today). Stopping at the Discovery Centre near the Tablelands, we had lunch outside and went inside to check out some of the exhibits, displays and a short film on Gros Morne. Gros Morme is one of just a few places on earth where one can see and experience a piece of the earth's mantle driven up from deep below the ocean floor and that was our next stop. Walking the short Serpentine Loop trail in the Tablelands, we got to see first hand some of the area's unique plant life and serpentine rock patterns, but looking out over further to the barren orange cliffs one could almost feel like they looking at an orange moonscape. Before leaving, we took some group photos and headed on our way to our final destination - Deer Lake. Arriving with a little time to explore the town, we checked out the town's water treatment ponds (Wood Ducks were the only interesting ducks there), and we walked a section of the Humber River trail (a nice trail through coniferous woods but we were unable to find anything too unusual along it). Checking into our motel, we relaxed for a couple hours before getting together for our final group meal. They gave us a special room, we had some wine to toast a very successful tour, and everyone got to talk about some of their favorite birds, mammals, plants and/or memories from the last week and a half. It had been a most enjoyable time, a great group and terrific memories of Newfoundland to take back home. Hopefully, this report and all the incredible photos taken by the dedicated photographers in this group will help you relive some of those great memories. **Day 12 – June 27** Our Newfoundland birding tour ends today. Mitch & Ken had to return the vans to St John's, and Mitch had to catch a mid-afternoon flight out of St John's, so we met a few folks that got up for a 7 o'clock breakfast and

right after breakfast were on our way. What a fantastic trip; what a great group. Hopefully our paths cross again in the future.



Our group

Grand Newfoundland Species List (June 16 - 27, 2024)