Eagle-Eye Tours



Grand Newfoundland Trip Report Jun 23 – Jul 4, 2025

Link: Grand Newfoundland Trip Report Jun 23 – Jul 4, 2025

Our group of eleven adventurers and two guides explored a remarkable diversity of spectacular scenery unlike anywhere else in North America. From the breathtaking fjords, forests and mountains of the west coast to the tundra-like barrens and incredible seabird colonies along the Avalon Peninsula – thousands of Northern Gannets, Atlantic Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwakes and both murres. Our tour started in Deer Lake, perched along the Humber River and the perfect jumping off point to explore nearby Gros Morne National Park.

June 24-26: Gros Morne National Park

Gros Morne National Park is considered one of the gems of Newfoundland, and rightly so. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the park is known around the globe for its amazing geology, stunning scenery and world-class hiking. We spent two full days soaking it all in – birds, wildlife, flowers and landscapes. Southern portions of the park offered our first glimpses of the park as we skirted around beautiful Bonne Bay. Our very first stop produced a flock of colorful Evening Grosbeak – a species often missed on the tour. Time spent exploring the Lomond & Stuckless Pond trailheads proved interesting as we enjoyed some curious Boreal Chickadees, several Lincoln's Sparrows, a singing Olive-sided Flycatcher, and a pair of Black-backed Woodpeckers. We even managed to find a patch of beautiful Yellow Lady's slippers, Showy Lady's slippers (not quite in full bloom) and a clump of the much rarer Striped Coralroot orchid. We also visited the magnificent Tablelands – a massive chunk of the earth's mantle that juts out of the ground like alien mountains. These rocks are so full of heavy metals that little can grow here, and the red barren landscape stands in stark contrast to the forested ridges of the Long Range Mountains that surround it. Geological formations like this can only be glimpsed at a few places on earth. While our hike through the Tablelands was nearly devoid of animal life, plenty of interesting plant species such as Purple Pitcher Plant (Newfoundland & Labrador's provincial flower), Common Butterwort and Round-leaf Sundew (all carnivorous!) and

hardy alpine shrubs dotted the landscape. While taking in the vista of Gros Morne Mountain, we spied a family of Common Mergansers as mom hustled the babies along the river and into cover.



Cape May Warbler © Jason Dain



Pine Grosbeak © Jason Dain



Yellow Lady-slipper © Jason Dain

Strolling trails in the northern half of the park, we spotted highlights such as Swainson's Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo, Rusty Blackbird, Pine Grosbeak and Philadelphia Vireo. We also found more than a dozen species of warbler including great views of Mourning Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Magnolia Warbler and Common Yellowthroat among others. Forays along the dramatic coastline produced more highlights such as Common Eider, Caspian Tern and a rather unexpected Parasitic Jaeger. It was fun to watch threatened Bank Swallows zipping in and out of their cliffside colony and over the roaring ocean at Parson's Pond. Beautiful wildflowers including dainty Dragon's mouth Orchids, Tall Northern Green Orchids, Spotted Coralroot and the unassuming Water Avens captured our attention along the way. A boat tour of the renowned Western Brook Pond fjord was a relaxing and beautiful treat – the glacier-carved cliffs and towering mountains absolutely breathtaking. What an amazing place to experience!



Birding group at Bonne Bay, Gros Morne National Park © Jared Clarke



Gros Morne Mountain with morning fog © Jared Clarke



Boreal Chickadee © Jason Dain



Lincoln's Sparrow © Jason Dain



Downy Woodpecker © Jason Dain

June 27: Central Newfoundland

The weather was just about perfect for our day in Grand Falls-Windsor, where we spent a morning exploring wetlands and the mixed forests of central Newfoundland on the beautiful Corduroy Brook Nature Trail. A great variety of songbirds entertained us from the trails – many of them carrying food and feeding recently fledged young. Alder Flycatchers called from the marsh, Fox Sparrows sang from treetops and we enjoyed better views of several warblers included Ovenbird, American Redstart and Tennessee Warbler. A quick stop at the local lagoons included our only Wood Ducks of the trip along with Green-winged Teal and many Ring-necked Ducks. After lunch, we visited the Exploits Valley Salmonid Interpretation Centre, located on the mighty Exploits River which flows nearly 250km from central Newfoundland to Notre Dame Bay on the northeast coast. The migration of Atlantic Salmon was in full swing, and we enjoyed watching dozens of these incredible fish through windows built into the ladder route and as they tried to jump over both natural and manmade waterfalls. Later that afternoon we pointed our vans east and headed off to our next destination at Terra Nova National Park National Park.



Wilson's Warbler © Jason Dain



Atlantic Salmon © Jason Dain

June 28: Terra Nova National Park

This day was spent exploring Terra Nova – Canada's most easterly national park and a great example of Newfoundland's lush boreal forests and sheltered ocean inlets. Our morning began with pre-breakfast birding adjacent to our lodge in Charlottetown, followed by hikes and explorations

around the park itself. We checked out old growth forests, spruce and larch bogs, coastal estuaries and tranquil ponds. We encountered numerous new birds along the way including Canada Jay, Red Crossbill and eastern Palm Warbler. A Ruffed Grouse was especially cooperative as it gathered gravel along the Dunphy's Pond Trail. We saw our first Moose of the trip as it crossed the highway on our drive to the park, and we spotted other interesting mammals such Snowshoe Hare and Beaver during our short hikes.



Juicy Pond, Terra Nova National Park © Jared Clarke



Pink Ladyslipper © Jason Dain



Canada Jay © Jason Dain



Ruffed Grouse © Jason Dain

June 29: Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve & THE Steller's Sea Eagle

This morning we detoured from our planned route to look for a very rare visitor to Newfoundland –

THE famous Steller’s Sea Eagle that has been roaming northeastern North America for the past few years and most recently hanging out in North River, Conception Bay. This incredibly large and beautiful eagle normally lives in Siberia and Japan, but somehow this individual wandered waaaay off-course and is now an honourary Newfoundlander ;) We arrived at its regular haunt on a beautiful morning, only to hear that it had flown off a few minutes earlier. So we waited. And waited. A Northern Goshawk soared over the cliffs to help entertain us, chased for a few moments by a Sharp-shinned Hawk. A family of Bald Eagles kept watch over the area, and an Osprey flew by in search of a good fishing location. Finally, as we were all preparing to leave, the eagle we were hoping for squawked and flew in right over our heads. It soared majestically over the river, circled a few times to show off its huge wingspan and beautiful colours … then slowly disappeared over the hillsides. What an amazing (and earned) encounter with perhaps the most famous bird on the continent!



Steller's Sea Eagle © Jason Dain



Common Tern © Jason Dain

One of the most anticipated days of any summer tour in Newfoundland is a visit to Cape St. Mary's. Known as one of the foggiest places on earth, we were fortunate to experience this amazing place on a beautiful clear afternoon. A short hike over the tundra brought us great views of "bird rock" (a towering sea stack) and surrounding cliffs that are home to North America's third largest colony of Northern Gannets. Thousands of these majestic birds greeted our arrival and the close views amazed everyone, as they always do. Among the hundreds of Black-legged Kittiwake and Common Murre that lined the cliffs, we also spied several nesting Razorbill and at least one Thick-billed Murre. On the rocks below, we picked out a Great Cormorant hanging out amongst several Double-crested Cormorants – another summer specialty for this location. Savannah Sparrows flitted around the path, while Horned Lark and American Pipit were singing and advertising their territory along the way. A Bald Eagle hovered over the cliffs clutching a murre in its talons, while a Northern Harrier was spotted coursing over the barrens. A return visit to the area that evening was rewarded with a stag Woodland Caribou meandering across the landscape, along with a beautiful sunset over the "tuckamore" (stunted forests of balsam fir).



Cape St. Mary's Vista © Jared Clarke



Northern Gannet © Jason Dain



Northern Gannet © Jason Dain



Birding group at Cape St. Mary's © Jared Clarke



Sunset at Cape St. Mary's © Jared Clarke



Caribou © Jason Dain

June 30 – July 1: The Southeastern Avalon Peninsula

The Avalon Peninsula's "eastern hyperoceanic barrens" are a unique and globally rare habitat, where the world's southernmost subarctic tundra meets the ocean – so we made sure to take time and explore it as we toured the area. Expansive barrens stretched out before us on several occasions

from St. Vincent's Beach to Cape Race National Historic Site. Overlooking the rugged cliffs and wild ocean at St. Shott's (the most southerly point on the island), we found a couple lingering Common Eiders along with nesting Black Guillemots, Double-crested Cormorants and numerous gulls of several species. A steady stream of pelagic seabirds offshore included hundreds of Sooty Shearwaters, several Manx Shearwaters and at least one Great Shearwater along with a small number of Leach's Storm-Petrels – an awesome show! At Cape Race, situated at Newfoundland's southeastern corner, we stood below one of the most important and iconic lighthouses in the North Atlantic to scan for seabirds. An American Pipit displayed overhead and several Black Guillemots loafed on the waters below, while a handful of Sooty Shearwater zipped by far offshore. Along the road we spotted two Short-eared Owls, a hunting Merlin and several Horned Lark twittering on the barrens.



Birding at Cape Race © Jared Clarke



Cape Race © Jason Dain

Continuing north along the “Irish Loop”, we were awed as the landscape changed from treeless barrens and towering cliffs to rolling coastline and eventually back to lush boreal forests. At Renews we enjoyed great views of at least three Arctic Terns perched on the rocks (along with a dozen Common Terns) – our best views of these beautiful birds that boast the longest migration in the world. A couple families of Northern Pintail dabbled in the estuary, along with several Green-winged Teal. We managed to spot a locally special Black-headed Gull at nearby Cape Broyle – an excellent addition to the list and one we often miss on this tour. A quick stop to view the southern islands of the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve (our second attempt, after fog thwarted our first one), we spotted more than a dozen Northern Fulmar nesting on the craggy cliffs of Ship Island – a relatively rare breeder in Atlantic Canada – along with the abundant Puffins, Murres and Kittiwakes.



Black-headed Gull © Jason Dain



Blackpoll Warbler © Jason Dain

July 2-4: St. John's & Witless Bay Ecological Reserve

The last few days of our adventure were based in St. John's – a historic, seaside city with amazing scenery and excellent birding right at its doorstep. Using the city as a hub, we spent our first few days exploring nearby parks, forests and seabird colonies of the northeast Avalon Peninsula. A boat tour of the incredible Witless Bay Ecological Reserve is always amazing, and this year was no exception. During summer, the islands in this reserve are home to more than 4.5 million breeding seabirds! Despite some rolling swell, we had a grand afternoon on the water and experienced the spectacle of North America's largest Atlantic Puffin colony numbering more than 250,000 pairs! Not to be outdone, tens of thousands of Common Murre were spotted on and around the islands. We also managed to pick out several much scarcer Thick-billed Murres nestled among the throngs. Black-legged Kittiwakes, Razorbills, Black Guillemots and some wandering Northern Gannets also joined in for the show. Dozens of Sooty Shearwaters gliding past the boat were a major highlight for the entire group. We also enjoyed watching several Humpback Whales along the way, and even lucked into a show of Capelin "rolling" (spawning) on the beach at the nearby town of Witless Bay. These small fish are an integral part of the food chain for the whales and seabirds that spend their summer here, and seeing that for ourselves was a special treat!



Atlantic Puffin © Jason Dain



Razorbill © Jason Dain



Common Murre © Jason Dain



Humpback Whale © Jason Dain

One morning was spent at Cape Spear National Historic Site – the easternmost point of land in North America. The lighthouse here dates back to 1836 and has been a key waypoint for travelers ever since. Here we had fun with a very cooperative American Pipit, singing Savannah Sparrows and lots of passing seabirds. For an added bonus, we spent quite some time watching two Humpback Whales and a small pod of Atlantic White-sided Dolphins that entertained us just offshore! Morning

strolls in the boreal forests that characterize this part of this island were filled with birds like Boreal Chickadee, Fox Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Northern Waterthrush and Blackpoll Warblers. City green spaces like Bidgood Park offered up Black-and-White Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, Swamp Sparrows and Cedar Waxwings among many others. Local ponds hosted a variety of waterfowl including American Black Ducks, Mallard, and American Wigeon – along with a lingering Eurasian Wigeon and Tufted Duck that are not usually here at this time of year. A long-staying Pink-footed Goose was a hands-down highlight – the rare visitor from Europe being a lifer for many participants.



St. John's from Signal Hill © Jared Clarke



Pink-footed Goose © Jason Dain



Tufted Duck © Jason Dain

Our tour concluded at our beautiful St. John’s hotel, where we reminisced and shared our favourite memories over dinner before heading our separate ways. What a fantastic trip, with a wonderful group of people! Grand Newfoundland Trip Report Jun 23 - Jul 4, 2025 eBird List