



Grand Newfoundland Trip Report (June 15 - 26, 2022)

[Link: Grand Newfoundland Trip Report \(June 15 - 26, 2022\)](#)

Grand Newfoundland Trip Report (June 15 - 26, 2022)

Our group of eleven nature lovers and two guides explored a variety of coastal, forest and even tundra habitats across beautiful Newfoundland from June 15-26. From showy songbirds to spectacular seabird colonies and whales to caribou, Canada's most easterly province offers a wonderful array of nature to enjoy.



Eagle-Eye Tours group 2022

June 15-20: The Avalon Peninsula

Our adventure began 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. Morning strolls in the boreal forests that characterize this part of this island were filled with birds like Boreal Chickadee, Fox Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Blackpoll Warblers. A Great Horned Owl sat conspicuously in a large fir tree, keeping a close eye on its nearby nest with two young. City green spaces like Bidgood Park offered up White-winged Crossbills, Wilson's Warblers, Swamps Sparrows and Bald Eagles. Local ponds hosted a variety of waterfowl including American Black Ducks, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler and locally unusual Wood Ducks. A long-staying Pink-footed Goose was a hands-down highlight – the rare visitor from Europe being a lifer for most participants. Cape Spear National Historic Site – the easternmost point of land in North America – was also fun with a very cooperative American Pipit, singing Savannah Sparrows and lots of passing seabirds. The lighthouse here dates back to 1836 and has been a key waypoint for travelers ever since.



Great Horned Owl © Jared Clarke



Black-headed Gulls © Jared Clarke



Pink-footed Goose © Jared Clarke

A boat tour of the incredible Witless Bay Ecological Reserve is always a hit, and this year was no different. A beautiful day on the water, we experienced the spectacle of North America's largest Atlantic Puffin colony numbering more than 250,000 pairs! Not to be outdone, hundreds of thousands of Common Murre were spotted on and around the islands. We also managed to pick out a much scarcer Thick-billed Murre nestled among the throngs. Black-legged Kittiwakes, Razorbills, Black Guillemots and some wandering Northern Gannets also joined in for the show. To top things off, we crossed paths with a mother and calf Humpback Whale. The young whale decided to wow us by jumping out of the water!



Atlantic Puffin © Jared Clarke



Common Murres © Jared Clarke



Humpback Whale © Jared Clarke

Heading south along the “Irish Loop”, we were awed as the landscape changed from rolling coastlines and lush forests to towering cliffs and treeless barrens. A quick stop to view the southern islands of the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, 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. A gaggle of Ring-necked Ducks were loafing in a roadside pond, while a sleepy White-winged Scoter at Cape Broyle made us work for an identification. Near La Manche Provincial Park, two Canada Jays popped in to check us out (they sure love people-watching!) while we were enjoying our first Black-throated Green Warblers of the trip. A stop at Renew's produced very close-up looks at six Red Crossbills – the local *percna* race is not only threatened but is considered endemic to Newfoundland. In the estuary, we managed to pick out at least four Arctic Terns among the more widespread Common Terns at a mixed colony – all while enjoying a picnic lunch with a wonderful view.



Red Crossbill © Jared Clarke

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. 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. American Pipits displayed overhead while two Common Eiders, uncommon here in summer, joined several Razorbill and Black Guillemots in the waters below us. At the edge of the distant fog, we spotted 250+ Sooty Shearwaters – these pelagic birds actually breed in the southern hemisphere and were spending their "winter" in the food-rich waters off Newfoundland! The vast barrens surrounding Cape Pine lighthouse at the southern tip of the peninsula proved foggy but delightful with a Northern Harrier, Horned Larks, American Pipit and plenty of Savannah Sparrows. We even managed to spot a few Woodland Caribou foraging on the tundra – part of the world's southernmost herd. Overlooking the rugged cliffs and wild ocean at nearby St. Shott's, we found a lingering flock of ten Common Eiders along with dozens of Northern Gannets, Black-legged Kittiwakes and some surprise Great Shearwaters that coasted by close to shore. An unexpected Glaucous Gull, rare in summer, was an added bonus as we enjoyed a windy picnic at St. Vincent's beach. The weather turned nasty for our visit to Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve, but not enough to stop our intrepid birders. Most of our group woke early and hiked through rain and very strong winds to see the fabled Northern Gannet colony at Bird Rock. Once there, we were thrilled by thousands of gannets going about their business despite the nasty weather. Common Murres, Black-legged Kittiwakes and

several Razorbills were also hunkered down at their nest sites waiting for the storm to pass. It may not have been an ideal visit, but it was a fascinating glimpse into the lives of these tenacious birds facing the elements (a fact of life when living on and near a turbulent ocean!) and an experience we won't soon forget!



Birding in the rain © Jared Clarke

June 21-23: Terra Nova National Park & Central Newfoundland

Our next two days were 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 mornings 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 Red-breasted Mergansers, American Redstarts, Magnolia Warblers, eastern Palm Warblers, Rusty Blackbirds, Olive-sided Flycatchers and Lincoln Sparrows among others. A Black-backed Woodpecker was heard calling as we soaked in the views from Blue - the highest point in the park - and it eventually came in to show itself for a few short moments. Butterflies even stole the spotlight a few times, especially when our guides got worked up over an Arctic Jutta fluttering at the edge of a bog. These may not be most colourful of butterflies, but their secretive habits and the fact they only emerge every two years makes them an exciting find.



Palm Warbler © Jared Clarke



Jutta Arctic © Jared Clarke

An afternoon stop in the hardwood forests of Gander's old town site proved especially productive - including great looks at a Downy Woodpecker, our only Least Flycatcher of the trip and fun playing hide-and-seek with a pair of elusive Mourning Warblers. Following a hot tip, we made a short detour into nearby Notre Dame Provincial Park to enjoy (from a respectful distance) a Northern Goshawk and two young in an active nest. These beautiful raptors are always a treat to see, but this was an

especially exciting encounter.

Our last day in this region was spent 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 Sora was heard calling from the marsh, but as is usual for this species it escaped being seen. A family of Ring-necked Ducks were diving at the edges of a pond, while a wonderful variety of songbirds entertained us from the trails. We encountered our first Alder Flycatchers, watched as Swamp Sparrows peeped through the reeds, and found brand new fledglings of Dark-eyed Juncos and White-throated Sparrows. Eleven species of warblers included new-for-the-trip Ovenbirds and Tennessee Warblers. After lunch, we took in several views of the mighty Exploits River, which roars its way nearly 250km from central Newfoundland to Notre Dame Bay on the northeast coast. An afternoon visit to the Exploits Valley Salmonid Interpretations Centre added another new species to our trip list. You guessed it - Atlantic Salmon. We were able to examine several up close through a glass viewing area as they took a break on their annual migration, before we headed off ourselves to Gros Morne National Park on the island's west coast.



Fox Sparrow © Jared Clarke



Atlantic Salmon © Jared Clarke

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. Strolling trails in the northern half of the park, we spotted highlights such as Swainson's Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo, Mourning Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and a rather unexpected Blackburnian Warbler. Beautiful wildflowers including dainty Dragonsmouth Orchids, abundant Blue-bead Lilies and unassuming Water Avenas captured our attention along the way. A noisy exchange between a Hairy Woodpecker and its hungry nestling provided lots of entertainment, as did a busy Bank Swallow colony above oceanside cliffs and crashing waves. A family of Common Eiders was found loafing along the shore at Parson's Pond. A boat tour of the renowned Western Brook Pond fjords was a relaxing and beautiful treat – the glacier-carved cliffs and towering mountains absolutely breathtaking.



Hairy Woodpeckers © Jared Clarke



Western Brook Pond © Jared Clarke



Ken with his lobster dinner © Jared Clarke

Southern portions of the park were equally amazing. Deer Arm, at the base of Gros Morne Mountain, offered up Common Mergansers, Common Loons and Bald Eagles along with a world-class view. Our stop at the Lomond & Stuckless Pond trailhead proved one of our “birdiest” moments of the trip as numerous Canada Jays popped in to check us out, several Pine Grosbeaks allowed very close looks, and a flock of Evening Grosbeak foraged along the road. A flurry of warblers included a Tennessee and Cape May Warblers – the latter of which came as a surprise and marked the last new bird of our tour! Several Showy Ladyslippers were recently open and in their full glory – certainly one of the most beautiful orchids in North America. We continued along beautiful Bonne Bay and visited the magnificent Tablelands – a massive chunk of the earth’s mantle that juts out of the ground. 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 life, a few interesting plant species such as Pitcher Plant, Common Butterwort and Round-leaf Sundew (all carnivorous!) and hardy alpine shrubs dotted the landscape. We even managed to find a patch of beautiful Yellow Ladyslippers to enjoy. What an amazing place to experience! Driving to our final destination, we pulled off an “eleventh hour” sighting of a Moose – an animal everyone had been hoping to see but had eluded us until the very last minute.



Canada Jay © Jared Clarke



Moose © Jared Clarke



collage of orchids © Jared Clarke

Our tour concluded in Deer Lake, 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!