Eagle-Eye Tours



Grand Newfoundland Trip Report (June 24 – July 5, 2024)

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Our group of eleven adventurers and two guides explored a remarkable diversity of spectacular scenery unlike anywhere else in North America. From incredible seabird colonies along the Avalon Peninsula – thousands of Northern Gannets, Atlantic Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwakes and both murres, to tundra-like barrens and the breathtaking fjords and mountains of the west coast.



Our group in Terra Nova

June 24-28: 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. Our very first 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 several very cooperative American Pipits, singing Savannah Sparrows and lots of passing seabirds. The fog sitting just offshore was a surprise blessing, as several pelagic species wandered closer to shore than they otherwise might – numerous Sooty Shearwater, several Manx Shearwater and at least one Great Shearwater made for plenty of excitement amongst our crew. Sooty & Great Shearwaters actually breed in the southern hemisphere and spend their "winter" in the food-rich waters off Newfoundland! Perhaps most exciting were several Humpback Whales, two Fin 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, White-winged Crossbill and Cedar Waxwings among many others. Local ponds hosted a variety of waterfowl including American Black Ducks, Mallard, American Wigeon and a locally scarce Hooded Merganser. A long-staying Pink-footed Goose was a hands-down highlight – the rare visitor from Europe being a lifer for many participants. With a little rain in the forecast we also took some time to tour "The Rooms" (the provincial museum and art gallery), learning lots about the natural, cultural and artistic histories of Canada's most easterly province.



Birding at Cape Spear © Jared Clarke



Blackpoll Warbler © Jared Clarke



Pink-footed Goose © Jared Clarke

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. A lone Great Shearwater made several close passes of our boat, allowing excellent views of this very pelagic wanderer.



Atlantic Puffin © Jared Clarke



Common Murre colony © Jared Clarke



Group on O'Brien's Boat © Jody Allair



Razorbills © 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 eventually treeless barrens. A quick stop to view the southern islands of the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, we spotted more than two 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. Near La Manche Provincial Park we enjoyed several Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, our first Black-throated Green Warbler and a very cooperative Hairy Woodpecker - notably, the latter is of a race endemic to Newfoundland. We encountered yet another endemic (and Threatened) subspecies at nearby Renews – several *percna* (Type 8) Red Crossbill that were confirmed with audio recordings. Also at Renews we found a Green-winged Teal and a locally rare Laughing Gull amongst the more common Herring, Ring-billed & Great Black-backed Gulls. In the estuary, we managed to pick out at least two Arctic Terns among the more widespread Common Terns at a mixed colony – all while enjoying a picnic lunch with a wonderful view.



Petty Harbour © 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. An American Pipit displayed overhead and several Black Guillemots loafed on the waters below, on this otherwise quiet day on the ocean. The vast barrens at the southern tip of the peninsula proved cool but delightful with Horned Larks tinkling their song along the roadsides, Blackpoll Warbler singing from the tuckamore and plenty of Savannah Sparrows at every stop. We even managed to find a pair of Willow Ptarmigan that showed very well for us after being flushed by the van – perhaps our biggest "target" on the day and an exciting encounter for everyone. Overlooking the rugged cliffs and wild ocean at nearby St. Shott's, we found a lingering flock of nine Common Eiders along with a much scarcer Harlequin Duck. Heavier rain found us around noon that day so enjoyed lunch in the van at St. Vincent, while watching dozens of Northern Gannets diving just offshore – an incredible spectacle of nature. Single Sooty and Great Shearwaters occasionally zipped through the frenzy, adding to the fun.



Cape Race Lighthouse © Jared Clarke



Willow Ptarmigan © Jared Clarke

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 day. 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 Thick-billed Murre. On the rocks below, we spied three Great Cormorants hanging out and drying their wings – another summer specialty for this location. Savannah Sparrows flitted around the path, while Horned Lark were singing and advertising their territory alongside the interpretation centre. A Bald Eagle and several Northern Harriers were spotted in the area, as well as both Greater Yellowlegs and a surprisingly cooperative Wilson's Snipe, nesting in the roadside bogs. We also stopped at Castle Hill National Historic Site in Placentia (the former "French capital" of Newfoundland) to explore a 17th century fort and learn more about the fishery that this province was built on.



Gannet colony at Cape St Mary's © Jared Clarke



Northern Gannets © Jared Clarke



Thick-billed Murre © Jared Clarke



Savannah Sparrow © Jared Clarke



Jared and Jody at Castle Hill

June 29 – July 1: Terra Nova National Park & Trinity Bight

Much of 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 American Redstarts, Magnolia Warblers, eastern Palm Warblers, Pine Grosbeak and Lincoln Sparrows among others. An Olive-sided Flycatcher was especially showy as it called from treetops right along a trail – more than appropriate since it is Birds Canada's 2024 avian ambassador! We also made time for a very special outing – a boat trip in nearby Trinity Bay to search for the very rare and equally famous STELLER'S SEA EAGLE that has now spent three summers hanging out in a small section of rugged coastline here. Despite some winds and choppy seas, we headed out the bay with very high hopes … and were *not* disappointed. After nearly an hour of searching, Jody spied the Steller's Sea Eagle sitting high atop a cliff, looking very much like king of the castle as several Bald Eagles were perched on rocks below. We spent some time enjoying this incredibly rare and unexpected bird; awed by its size, elegance and massive bill. It eventually took flight, circling high above the headland and eventually out of sight. Buoyed by our experience with this awesome bird, our encounters with several Humpback Whales on the ride back to Trinity were just icing on a very special cake ;)



Canada Jay © Jared Clarke



Group in survival suits



Group in survival suits © Jared Clarke

July 2: 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 family of Ring-necked Ducks were diving at the edges of a pond, while a wonderful

variety of songbirds entertained us from the trails – many of them carrying food and feeding recently fledged young. Alder Flycatchers called from the marsh, Wilson's Snipe winnowed overhead and an array of warblers included new-for-the-trip Ovenbirds, Mourning and Tennessee Warblers. After lunch, we visited the Exploits Valley Salmonid Interpretations 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 west and headed off to our next destination at Gros Morne National Park.



Black-and-white Warbler © Jared Clarke



Lincoln's Sparrow © Jared Clarke



Looking at Atlantic Salmon © Jared Clarke



Short-tailed Swallowtail © Jody Allair

July 3 -4: 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, Pine Grosbeak and White-winged Crossbill. Beautiful wildflowers including numerous Showy Lady Slippers, dainty Dragonsmouth Orchids, Tall Northern Green Orchids, Roundleaf Orchid and the unassuming Water Avens captured our attention along the way. One of the most entertaining encounters of the week was a Beaver meandering slowly up the middle of a park road, refusing to move over and let us go by. 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. 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. In addition to the scenery, we also spotted our only Common Goldeneye of the week.



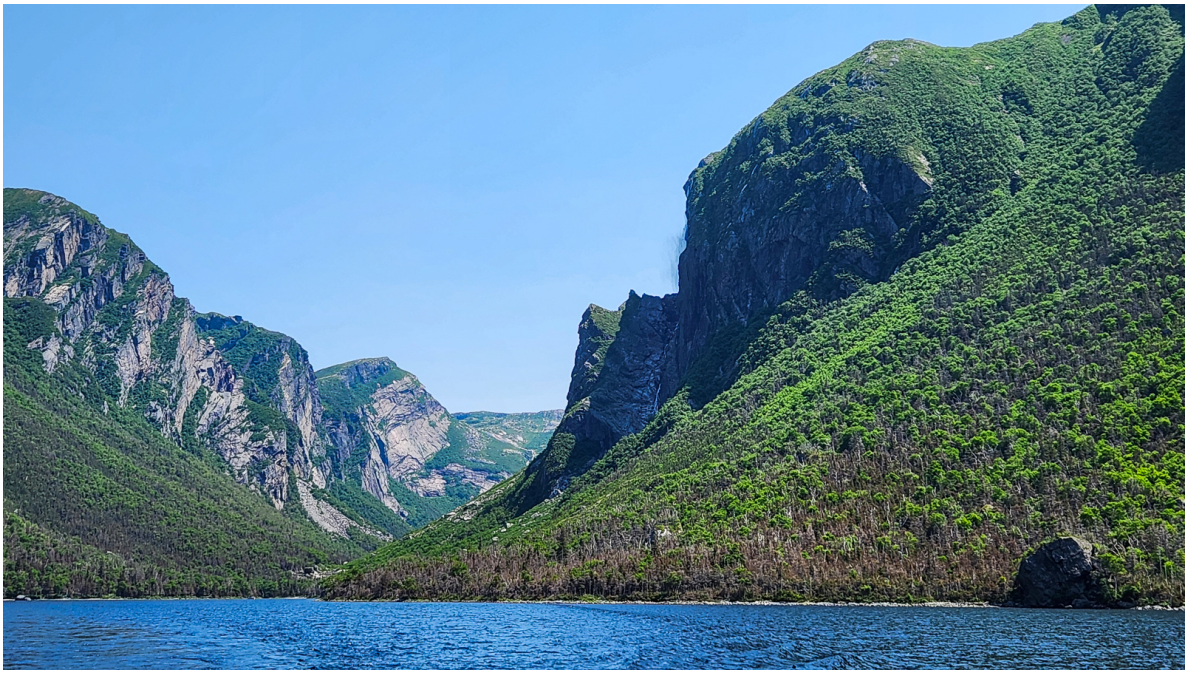
Swainson's Thrush © Jared Clarke



Showy Ladyslipper © Jared Clarke



Beaver © Jared Clarke



Western Brook Pond © Jared Clarke

Southern portions of the park were equally amazing. Deer Arm, at the base of Gros Morne Mountain, offered up two Moose picking their way along the water's edge. We also enjoyed great views of both Evening Grosbeak and a locally uncommon Philadelphia Vireo here – a species often missed on the tour. Our stop at the Lomond & Stuckless Pond trailhead proved interesting as we enjoyed a family of curious Canada Jays and a very cooperative Pine Grosbeak, along with many other birds. We even

managed to find a patch of beautiful Showy Ladyslippers in full glory, along with numerous clumps of the much rarer Striped Coralroot orchid. 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 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. What an amazing place to experience!



Gros Morne Mountain © Jared Clarke



Pine Grosbeak and Canada Jay © Jared Clarke



Tablelands © Jared Clarke



Sunset at Rocky Harbour © Jody Allair

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!
Newfoundland Bird List (Jun 24 - Jul 5, 2025)