



## **New Brunswick & Grand Manan Birding Tour 2021**

[Link: New Brunswick & Grand Manan Birding Tour 2021](#)

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Our group of nine nature lovers and two guides explored birding hotspots across New Brunswick (including the beautiful island of Grand Manan) from August 13-22. After eighteen months of pandemic and sticking close to our homes, we were all very excited to hit the road and share an adventure! New Brunswick has a lot to offer in late summer - lush boreal forests, spectacular shorebird migration and tons of seabirds just to name a few. This tour is a wonderful way to sample it all.



*EET group 2021*

## **August 13 - 15: Bay of Fundy (Saint John to Johnson Mills)**

Our group met in Saint John - the perfect hub to serve as a beginning, middle and end for our New Brunswick tour. We quickly got acquainted over dinner at a nearby restaurant where the fish & chips were fresh and tasty. For those who love seafood, Atlantic Canada has plenty to sample. We spent our first morning exploring the beautiful forests of Fundy National Park. Resident species like Golden-crowned Kinglet and Black-capped Chickadee were joined by others preparing for their big fall migration - such as Blue-headed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Bay-breasted & Black-throated Green Warblers. A family of Hooded Mergansers lounged on a secluded pond, surrounded by pitcher plants and an abundance of tasty berries. Exciting finds included four Red Crossbills at the head of our very first trail, and a very confiding Black-backed Woodpecker working a tree just metres from our very happy birders. After lunch, we headed to the Fundy coast and found our first migrant shorebirds in the form of Least Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers and Greater Yellowlegs. At least three Nelson's Sparrows were singing in the saltmarsh, and two popped up to give us our first glimpses of this famously secretive species. We ended our day watching the famous Bay of Fundy tides reach their apex at Mary's Point Bird Sanctuary (part of the Shepody National Wildlife Area). While most of the shorebirds were obviously roosting in other parts of the bay, a thousand Semipalmated Sandpipers looped and swirled over the rising waters while as many as four Peregrine Falcons patrolled the beaches in search of lunch. Heading back to the vehicles, we stopped to enjoy an Alder Flycatcher lurking in the bushes and a beautiful White-winged Crossbill bellowing its song from the treetops.



*Black-backed Woodpecker*



*Red Crossbill*



*Semipalmated Sandpipers*



The next morning found us strolling the leisurely trails of Sackville Waterfowl Park. As its name suggests, there was a plethora of ducks and other water-loving birds to keep us busy - American Wigeon, Gadwall, Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Ducks and Pied-billed Grebes in the water; Red-winged Blackbirds and Swamps Sparrows in the surrounding reeds. The trails hosted a variety of songbirds including six species of warbler. Belted Kingfishers entertained us as they hovered, dove and rattled away. A special treat was playing "peek-a-boo" with a family of Virginia Rails hiding in the marsh - including at least three fluffy chicks. Our next stop at the Sackville Retention Ponds produced wonderful views of dozens of Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitchers and several sneaky Wilson's Snipe. Heading south to Johnson Mills Shorebird Reserve, we were awed by the sight of many thousands (we conservatively estimated

15,000+) Semipalmated Sandpipers foraging on the vast mudflats as the tide rushed in. There were birds spread out as far and wide as you could see!



*Birding Sackville*



*Virginia Rail Chick*



*Semipalmated Sandpiper*

## **August 16-17: The Acadian Coast**

Our next two days were spent in the heartland of Acadian culture and history - Bouctouche & Kouchibouguac National Park. Acadian pride, rich accents and local cuisine (fresh clams, rappé and blackened salmon!) were on full display during our visit - as were plenty of great birds. Our first birding stop proved to be a crowd favourite - a stroll along Kouchibouguac's beautiful Kelly's Beach. Great Blue Herons hunted in the estuary, Northern Gannets and Common Terns fished off the coast, and several Grey Seals were caught poking their heads up to "people watch". Nearly a dozen species of shorebirds paraded the beach and mudflats including Ruddy Turnstones, Black-bellied Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers and our first White-rumped Sandpipers of the trip. Even a Tennessee Warbler was spotted foraging along the sandy beach, reminding us that birds often show up in unexpected habitats during the frenzy of migration. A late morning hike on the Bog Trail produced not only our target eastern Palm Warblers, but also a Hermit Thrush that was busy (apparently) feeding fledged young. The unique song of White-winged Crossbills reverberated through the treetops, and cicadas hummed in the hot sun.



*Semipalmated Plover*



*Palm Warbler*

The quaint town of Bouctouche also offered excellent birding. The hotel property was busy with an array of birds like Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Gray Catbird, American Redstart, Northern Parula and Purple Finch. The tidal marsh at Rotary Park hosted dozens of shorebirds including two Willets, as well as dabbling ducks like American Black Duck and Green-winged Teal. Mixed flocks were encountered on the River Trail including Blue-headed Vireo, Bay-Breasted Warbler, Blackburnian

Warbler and Chestnut-sided Warbler among others. Even our picnic spot at the Irving Arboretum was hopping with birds - especially Cedar Waxwings and Yellow-rumped Warblers feeding on abundant insects in the grass. Two Least Flycatchers, a family of Downy Woodpeckers and our only Swainson's Thrush of the trip were also lunchtime highlights. An ice cream stop at "Le Petit Cremier" fueled us up for an afternoon drive back to Saint John.



*Black-throated Green Warbler*



*Blackburnian Warbler*

## August 18-21: Grand Manan Island

After a relaxed night in Saint John, we made our way to the ferry and three days of exploring beautiful Grand Manan. This island, situated in the Bay of Fundy, is a wonderful mix of great scenery, maritime culture and wonderful birding. Pelagic birding is always a highlight of our time in Grand Manan, and this year was no different. Despite a little fog, we enjoyed an array of seabirds from both the ferry and an afternoon boat trip into the Bay of Fundy. Dozens of Great Shearwaters, Northern Gannets and Wilson's Storm-Petrels sailed out of the mist while Harbour Porpoise swam alongside the boat. Flocks of Red-necked (and some Red) Phalaropes skittered past, while occasional Atlantic Puffins, Common Murre and Razorbills sat obligingly on the water as we coasted slowly by. With a little patience, our very talented tour operators were even able to find some beautiful Humpback Whales by listening for their telltale blows in the fog!



*Greater Shearwater*



*Humpback Whale*



*Wilson's Storm Petrel*



### *Pelagic Birding*

Our terrestrial wanderings took us to all corners of Grand Manan - from the sheer, rugged cliffs of Southwest Head to the rolling rocks at Swallowtail Lighthouse and many points between. We visited Castalia Marsh on several occasions, enjoying the variety of shorebirds that came and went with the changing tides. The photographers appreciated some extremely close encounters with Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, while the gaudy colours of Ruddy Turnstones inspired more than a few smiles. High tide pushed more than a dozen secretive Nelson's Sparrows out of the marsh and into view - including an especially cooperative family group that really showed off. A locally rare Snowy Egret was also spotted here, as was an equally unexpected Little Blue Heron just a few miles away. The first hints of songbird migration were obvious around the Marathon Inn property and at several stops around the island. All in all, we found 19 species of warblers, three species of vireo and many other gems when we stopped to "pish" the forests. We even spared time to appreciate other little critters from butterflies to seals, including a surprise Smooth Green Snake, along the way.



*Swallowtail Lighthouse*



*Nelson's Sparrow*



*Least Sandpiper*



*Smooth Green Snake*

With better visibility, our return ferry trip was even “birdier” than the first. In addition to the regular suspects seen during previous days, we spotted a Sooty Shearwater, three Black-legged Kittiwakes and watched a Parasitic Jaeger chase a very upset gull right over top of the boat. Back in Saint John, our final birding stop at Irving Nature Park produced several new species for the trip including two Great Egrets (along with yet another Snowy Egret) and a group of Surf Scoters (along with a very distant Red-throated Loon that Jared desperately tried to convince the others was actually there!).

We reminisced and shared our favourite memories over dinner in historic “Old Town”, and were greeted back at the hotel by a Northern Cardinal calling at dusk (our last new bird of the week). What a fantastic trip, with a wonderful group of people! [New Brunswick & Grand Manan 2021 species list](#) (pdf)