



New Brunswick & Grand Manan Trip Report 2023

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Guides Jared Clarke & Dominic Cormier Our group of ten nature lovers and two guides explored birding hotspots across New Brunswick (including the beautiful island of Grand Manan) from August 11-20. 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 to New Brunswick & Grand Manan](#) is a wonderful way to sample it all.

August 11-13: 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 Hermit Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blackburnian & Black-throated Green Warblers. A family of American Black Ducks lounged on a secluded pond, surrounded by pitcher plants and an abundance of tasty berries. Other fun finds included an Ovenbird foraging on the shady forest floor, and our first flocks of White-winged Crossbills flying over and calling from the treetops at several stops. After lunch, we headed to the Fundy coast and observed the famous low tides at Mary's Point Bird Sanctuary. Large numbers of shorebirds (mostly Semipalmated Sandpipers) were spread out as far as the eye could see, foraging and bulking up for a long journey south. A Sharp-shinned Hawk careened over the treetops, and several Cliff Swallows darted back and forth to their busy nests. Heading back to the vehicles, we stopped to listen to the unique song of a Nelson's Sparrow teasing us from the trailside marsh. A brilliantly patterned Calligraphy Beetle was also a neat and unexpected find.



Caribou Plains © Jared Clarke



Calligraphy Beetle © Jared Clarke

The next morning found us on the other side of Shepody Bay at the Johnson Mills Shorebird Reserve - just in time for the spectacle we were all anticipating. Arriving an hour before high tide, we were awed by the sight of many thousands of Semipalmated Sandpipers, along with smaller numbers of Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper and Semipalmated Plovers, foraging on the vast mudflats as the tide rushed in. The number swelled along with the waters until eventually ~65,000 (as estimated by Nature Conservancy Canada staff) of these little birds were huddled together on a narrow strip or remaining beach!! The truly amazing moments came as they took flight, forming huge murmurations that swirled and floated and twisted above the bay with incredible art and precision. These flights were sometimes triggered by the arrival of as many as THREE hungry Peregrine Falcons looking for lunch, other times for reasons unclear to us. Perhaps they just enjoyed entertaining us!



Semipalmated Sandpipers at Johnson Mills © Jared Clarke



Semipalmated Sandpipers flying © Jared Clarke



Semipalmated Sandpipers murmuration © Jared Clarke

We also stopped at the Dorchester Lagoons, where Canada's oldest prison loomed over us as we birded the fields and wetlands. A Northern Harrier sat obligingly as it surveyed the traintracks for an easy meal, while Wood Ducks and our only Northern Shovelers of the week frolicked in a lagoon. A large flock of swallows included all four of the expected species (Tree, Barn, Bank and Cliff), while a lone Chimney Swift circled high above the far fields. After lunch, we visited the nearby 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, Mallards and Blue-winged Teal in the water; several families of Pied-billed Grebe including some brand new fledglings; Red-winged Blackbirds and Swamps Sparrows in the surrounding reeds. The trails hosted a variety of songbirds including several Northern Parula and American Redstarts as well as Downy Woodpecker. Belted Kingfishers entertained us as they hovered, dove and rattled away, and an American Kestrel zipped by with a hummingbird in hot pursuit.



Pied-billed Grebe on nest © Jared Clarke

August 14-15: 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 was an unplanned stop at the Kouchibouguac Visitor's Centre, where we were greeted by a mixed flock of migrants in the parking lot. We teased out nine species of warbler, including great looks at gems such as Blackburnian Warbler and Northern Parula. A Tennessee Warbler snuck through the foliage, a Pine Warbler was singing from the pines a Red Crossbill perched in the treetops for all to enjoy.



Blackburnian Warbler © Jared Clarke

Next, we headed off for a stroll along beautiful Kelly's Beach and overlooking the warm waters of the Northumberland Strait. Great Blue Herons hunted in the estuary; Common Terns, Bonaparte's Gulls and a few Northern Gannets fished off the coast; and several Grey Seals were caught poking their heads up to "people watch". Ten species of shorebirds paraded the beach and mudflats including Ruddy Turnstones, Black-bellied Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers and our best views of White-rumped Sandpipers of the trip. Two Whimbrel flew along the beach, calling as they went.



Common Tern © Jared Clarke



White-rumped Sandpiper © Jared Clarke

A late morning hike on the Bog Trail produced only brief glimpses of our target eastern Palm Warblers, but a plethora of interesting plants and flowers to learn about and appreciate in this amazing habitat. A family of Groundhogs popped out to entertain us during our picnic lunch, while the unique song of White-winged Crossbills reverberated through the treetops and cicadas hummed in the hot sun. The quaint town of Bouctouche also offered excellent birding. The parking lot at “La Pays de la Sagouine” (a period Acadian village) was busy with birds such as Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatch and a mixed flock of warblers including Chestnut-sided, Bay-breasted and Magnolia. We spied our only Willet of the trip on a sandy spit at Rotary Park. The tidal pools there hosted both Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs along with several Green-winged Teal, American Black Ducks and American Wigeon. Our picnic lunch took place at the Irving Arboretum – a stunning park that was alive with both flowers and birds. Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Gray Catbird and Nashville Warbler were just some of our lunchtime highlights. An ice cream stop at “Le Petit Cremier” was especially popular, and fueled us up for an afternoon drive back to Saint John.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird © Jared Clarke



Bouctouche Arboretum © Jared Clarke

We broke up the drive with a quick stop at the Salisbury Wetland Trail, where we heard both Virginia Rail and Sora but simply could not find them in the thick reeds. Two American Coots dabbled in the marsh, and a family of Common Gallinules was a special treat as they are a scarce breeding species in Atlantic Canada. A Great Blue Heron entertained us as it caught several fish in the shallow water, and both an Eastern Kingbird and Eastern Phoebe turned out to be our only

sightings of the tour.



Great Blue Heron © Jared Clarke



Eastern Phoebe © Jared Clarke

August 16-19: 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. Our first Common Eiders were spotted while waiting for the ferry in Black's Harbour - a species we would become familiar with over the next few days. We had excellent weather for much of our ferry trip, and were able to spot birds such as Black-legged Kittiwake, Great Shearwater, Northern Gannet and Common Murre before hitting fog at the northern tip of Grand Manan. Even an Ocean Sunfish (Mola mola) floated by just metre from the boat.



Birding from the Ferry © Dominic Cormier



Great Shearwater © Dominic Cormier

The day of our pelagic boat tour was also nice - sunny and warm, with relatively calm seas. Dozens of Great Shearwaters, Northern Gannets, Wilson's & Leach's Storm-Petrels and a few Sooty Shearwaters & Northern Fulmar sailed effortlessly over the waves while Harbour Porpoise swam alongside the boat. Occasional flocks of both Red and Red-necked Phalaropes skittered past, and loads of Atlantic Puffins appeared to entertain us as we coasted along. A Parasitic Jaeger flew past our boat creating some excitement, while a South Polar Skua taunted us by hanging out in the distance. Two Lesser Black-backed Gulls joined the larger group of Herring & Great Black-backed Gulls following our trail of chum. With a little patience, we were also able to find several beautiful Humpback Whales and playful Atlantic White-sided Dolphins feeding in the deep ocean waters.



Great Shearwater © Jared Clarke



Wilson's Storm Petrel © Jared Clarke



Atlantic Puffin © Jared Clarke



Atlantic White-sided Dolphin © Jared Clarke



Humpback whale © Jared Clarke



Lesser Black-backed Gull © Dominic Cormier

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. Highlights here included our only Solitary Sandpiper of the trip, as well as ample opportunity to study species such as Black-bellied Plover and Short-billed Dowitcher at much closer range.

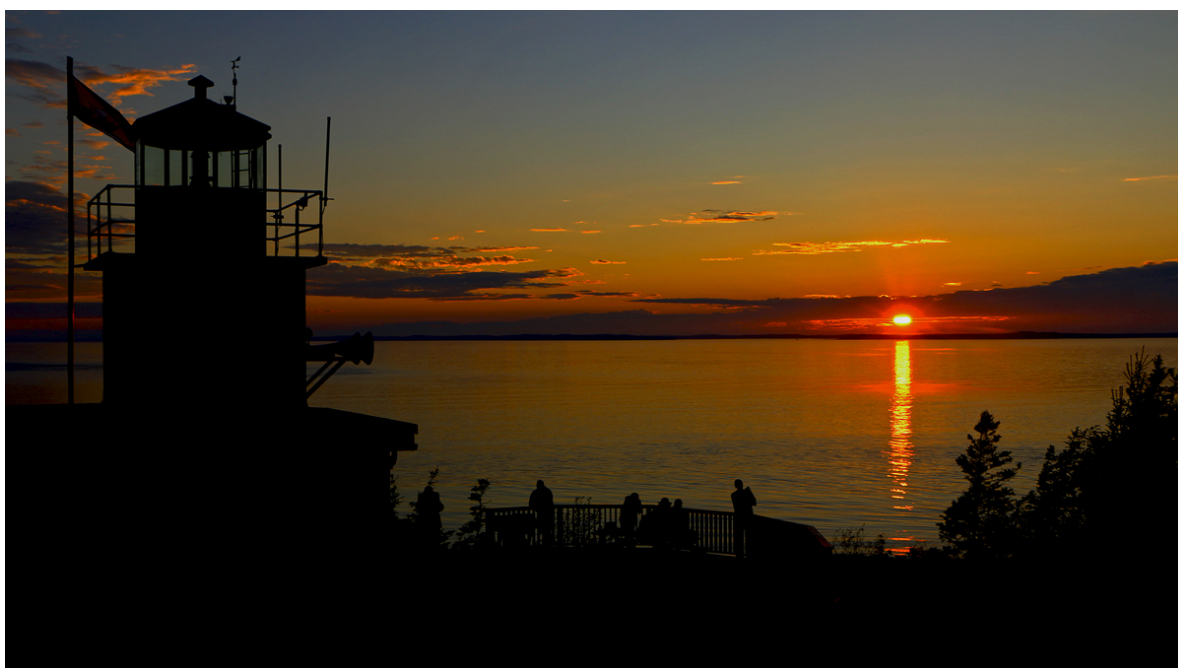


Southwest Head Grand Manan © Jared Clarke

Several Nelson's Sparrows popped out of the marsh and into view - our best looks by far at this otherwise secretive bird. Even a locally rare Little Blue Heron put in a showing, foraging in long grass and resting on the exposed flats. The first hints of songbird migration were obvious at various stops around the island, including several mixed flocks of warblers, vireos, empid flycatchers and more when we stopped to "pish" the forests. We even spared time to appreciate other little critters from butterflies to seals, and a beautiful sunset at Long Eddie Point (aka "The Whistle").



Swallowtail Lighthouse © Jared Clarke



Sunset at the Whistle © Jared Clarke

Our return ferry trip was a little less “birdy” than the first, but we did manage a few fun sightings including two Arctic Terns coursing alongside the boat. Back in Saint John, our final birding stop at Irving Nature Park produced several new species for the trip including eight Great Egrets (a large number for this area!), a lone Killdeer and a very distant group of Surf Scoters. We reminisced and shared our favourite memories over dinner in historic “Old Town” before setting off on our various paths home. What a fantastic trip, with a wonderful group of people!



Group photo 2023