



## New Brunswick & Grand Manan Trip Report 2024

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Our fun-loving group of nature lovers and two guides explored birding hotspots across New Brunswick (including the lovely island of Grand Manan) from August 16-25. This beautiful province has much to offer in late summer – lush boreal forests, spectacular shorebird migration and tons of seabirds just to name a few – and this tour was a wonderful way to sample it all.



*EET 2024 group*

## **August 16-18: 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 lobster rolls were fresh and tasty. For those who love seafood, Atlantic Canada has plenty to sample. We began our first morning with a stop at nearby Hampton. The town's sewage lagoons at the Rotary Nature Park were busy with lots of Wood Ducks, Northern Shovelers, Green-winged Teal, Common Goldeneyes and other ducks - but it was the surrounding trail and trees that were most hopping with birdlife. A mixed flock of early migrants hosted nine species of warblers including Cape May, Tennessee, Northern Parula and American Redstarts. Red-breasted Nuthatch, Song Sparrows, Red-eyed Vireo, Alder Flycatcher and Eastern Phoebe also numbered among the group. While dozens of Cedar Waxwings were hawking insects all through the park. A Sharp-shinned Hawk zipped through to check put the action, and a "committee" of more than 20 Turkey Vultures descended on the berm as we were leaving.



*Turkey Vulture © Mitch Doucet*



*White-tailed Deer © Mitch Doucet*

The next few hours were spent exploring the beautiful forests & landscapes 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 Magnolia and Black-and-White Warblers. A family of Common Loons lounged on a tranquil pond, while our first Red Crossbills of the week called from lofty treetops. We were also surprised by a young Bald Eagle that swooped in very close as we enjoyed a seaside picnic.



*Song Sparrow © Mitch Doucet*



*Frog © Mitch Doucet*

After lunch, we followed the coast to neighbouring Waterside, where several small flocks of shorebirds provided excellent views of Short-billed Dowitcher, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs among others. A Great Egret foraging in the marsh turned out to be our only one of the trip. We arrived at Mary's Point Bird Sanctuary just as the famous Bay of Fundy tides were ebbing their lowest and vast numbers 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. 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 more than 25,000 of these little birds were huddled together on a narrow strip of 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 a hungry Peregrine Falcon or Merlin looking for lunch, other times for reasons unclear to us. Perhaps they just enjoyed entertaining us!



*Semipalmated Sandpipers © Mitch Doucet*



*Semipalmated Sandpipers © Mitch Doucet*

Throughout the morning, we also stopped at several wetlands. Bell Marsh in Moncton was relatively quiet but a showy Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk and a very unexpected Yellow-crowned Night Heron (rare in New Brunswick) made for excellent highlights. A secretive Sora peeked through the cattails momentarily, allowing just a few folks to catch a glimpse. The Reid McManus Nature Reserve in Memramcook had few waterfowl, but the surrounding trees buzzed with migrants such as

Blue-headed Vireo, Northern Parula and an elusive Black-throated Blue Warbler. After lunch, we visited the nearby Sackville Waterfowl Park. As its name suggests, there was a variety of ducks and other water-loving birds to keep us busy - American Wigeon, Gadwall and Mallards in the water, along with several families of Pied-billed Grebe including some lovely patterned fledglings. Red-winged Blackbirds called from the surrounding reeds while Belted Kingfishers entertained us as they hovered, dove and rattled away. An afternoon drive through the agricultural fields of Jolicure, near the Nova Scotia border, offered up a pair of American Kestrels hunting over the meadows and numerous Barn Swallows enjoying the bugs.



*Pied-billed Grebe © Mitch Doucet*

## **August 19-20: 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 chicken fricot!) were on full display during our visit - as were plenty of great birds. Our first birding stop at the Bouctouche lagoons was surprisingly birdy with 40 species on display. Several Lesser Scaup joined other ducks for a new trip sighting, a Peregrine Falcon zipped by and a group of Lesser Yellowlegs allowed our photographer some very close-up portraits. A very unexpected Northern Mockingbird was spotted foraging in a nearby yard, but perhaps the biggest surprise was an adult Little Gull hiding amongst the 150+ Bonaparte's Gull - a rare sighting, especially for this part of New Brunswick!



*Little Gull © Mitch Doucet*

Our first stop at Kouchibouguac National Park was beautiful Kelly's Beach, where we enjoyed a stroll along the sandy beach and overlooking the warm waters of the Northumberland Strait. Great Blue Herons hunted in the estuary; Common Terns and Northern Gannets fished off the coast; and several Grey Seals were caught poking their heads up to "people watch". Eight species of shorebirds paraded the beach and mudflats including Black-bellied Plovers, Sanderling and our best views of White-rumped Sandpipers of the trip. An unusually cooperative Belted Kingfisher sat patiently on the boardwalk rail, focused on the waters below as we soaked in its gaudy colours. 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.



*Black-bellied Plover* © Mitch Doucet



*Semipalmated Plover* © Mitch Doucet

The quaint town of Bouctouche also offered excellent birding. Morning birding at the Irving Arboretum found several mixed flocks of migrating songbirds including multiple warblers, Chipping Sparrow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglets and our only Philadelphia Vireo of the trip. The tidal flats and marshes at nearby Rotary Park hosted a nice variety of shorebirds such as Killdeer, Short-billed Dowitcher, a very vocal Willet and dozens of both Great & Lesser Yellowlegs. Other stops along the coast from Cap Lumière to Cap Brûlé produced even more shorebirds, including our first Pectoral Sandpipers. Other highlights included a dozen Common Eiders, a hungry Merlin coursing along the mudflats and an excellent lunch at the Pumphouse Brewery in lovely Shediac.



*Willet © Mitch Doucet*



*Irving Arboretum © Jared Clarke*

We broke up our drive back to Saint John with a stop at the Salisbury Wetland Trail **at the Highland Park**, where we were surprised to find a Red-necked Phalarope, allowing us close and prolonged views as it spun around in the marshy waters. While we expected to see these birds over the ocean later this week, an intimate encounter on freshwater like this was a nice treat. A lingering Common Gallinule was also 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, several Eastern Kingbird hawked from treetops and a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers turned out to be our only sighting of the week.



*Red-necked Phalarope © Mitch Doucet*



*Wood Duck © Mitch Doucet*

## August 21-24: Grand Manan Island

After a night in Saint John and dinner at the famous Reversing Falls, we made our way to Black's Harbour and the gateway to the next leg of our adventure. A group of Wild Turkeys was spotted enroute - this species has moved north from Maine in recent years and a nice addition to our New Brunswick list. We soon caught our ferry and sailed off for 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 exciting birding.



*Pelagic group © Mitch Doucet*

Pelagic birding is always a highlight of our time in Grand Manan, and this year was no different. Our first Black Guillemots 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 fine but breezy weather for much of our ferry trip, and were able to spot birds such as Pomarine Jaeger, Great Shearwater, Razorbill and Common Murre. Two Humpback Whales also made an appearance, exciting even the other "non-birding" passengers on deck. The day of our pelagic boat tour was also nice - sunny and warm - although somewhat rougher seas made for more challenging conditions. Dozens of Great Shearwaters, Northern Gannets, Wilson's Storm-Petrels and a few Sooty Shearwaters sailed effortlessly over the waves while occasional flocks of both Red and Red-necked Phalaropes skittered past. More than a dozen Great Cormorants were spied lounging on the "Black Rocks", and plenty of Atlantic Puffins appeared to entertain us as we coasted along. At least three Pomarine Jaegers flew past our boat creating some excitement, while a South Polar Skua taunted us by zipping by too quickly for many to enjoy. Several Lesser Black-backed and locally scarce Laughing Gulls joined the larger group of Herring & Great Black-backed Gulls following our trail of chum.



*Pomarine Jaeger* © Mitch Doucet



*Great Cormorant* © Mitch Doucet



*Laughing Gull © Mitch Doucet*



*Lesser Black-backed Gull © Mitch Doucet*



*Sooty Shearwater © David McCorquodale*

A separate boat trip, generously offered by Mitch's friends, to Bill's Islet allowed us to see a pair of American Oystercatchers - one of just two pairs known to breed in Canada!



*American Oystercatcher © Mitch Doucet*

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.



*Birding Southwest Head, Grand Manan © Dorte Kjeldmand*



*Swallowtail Lighthouse © Jared Clarke*



*Castalia blind © Mitch Doucet*



*Group at Castalia blind © Jared Clarke*



*Yellowlegs © Mitch Doucet*

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



*Birding at Anchorage Provincial Park © Jared Clarke*

We spied several Black-legged Kittiwakes among the larger gulls at Southwest Head. Several Nelson's Sparrows popped out of the marsh and into view - surprisingly cooperative for this otherwise secretive bird.



*Nelson's Sparrow © Jared Clarke*



© David McCorquodale

*Nelson's Sparrow © David McCorquodale*

Even a regionally rare “Great White Heron” (a white form of Great Blue Heron that normally occurs in Florida and may someday be considered a different species) put in a showing, foraging on the exposed flats at Woodward’s Cove. We encountered little flocks of migrating songbirds at several locations, including new species such as Black-throated Green Warbler, Warbling Vireo and Least Flycatcher plus better looks at Nashville and Chestnut-sided Warblers.



*Cape May Warbler © Mitch Doucet*



*Warbling Vireo © Mitch Doucet*

A ridiculously tame Brown-headed Cowbird walked around our feet and between our legs, even enjoying a drink from Mitch's water bottle! We also spared time to appreciate other little critters from butterflies to seals, a lovely lighthouse and many stunning seascapes. Our return ferry trip was a little less "birdy" than the first, but the perfect weather and flat seas made for a very enjoyable sail. Back in Saint John, our final birding stops at Redhead Marsh and Marsh Creek were quiet in the

mid-afternoon, but provided a leisurely end to our busy week. We reminisced and shared our favourite memories over dinner (with our new favourite waitress) before setting off on our various paths home. What a fantastic trip, with a wonderful group of people!



*Our group at sunset © Mitch Doucet*

[New Brunswick & Grand Manan Birding Tour Bird List \(Aug 16 - 25, 2024\)](#)