Eagle-Eye Tours



New Brunswick & Grand Manan Trip Report (August 12-21, 2022)

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with Jared Clarke & Sarah Gutowsky Our group of ten nature lovers and two guides explored birding hotspots across New Brunswick (including the beautiful island of Grand Manan) from August 12-21. 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, NB 2022

August 12-14: 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 enjoyed a short walk and dinner at a nearby restaurant, getting acquainted with the fun group we would be sharing this adventure with. Our first morning found us 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 Ring-necked Ducks lounged on a secluded pond, surrounded by pitcher plants and an abundance of tasty berries. Other finds included two secretive Ovenbirds foraging on the shady forest floor, and several Merlins patrolling their neighbourhood and keeping a sharp eye out for a snack. After lunch, we headed to the Fundy coast and watched the famous tides recede 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, dozens of Semipalmated Sandpipers, Black-bellied Plovers, and Semipalmated Plovers along with a few Least and one White-rumped Sandpiper stopped into keep us company. A Northern Harrier hunted low over the estuary. Heading back to the vehicles, we stopped to enjoy two Nelson's Sparrows teasing us from the trailside marsh with brief glimpses and snippets of their unique song.



Birding Wolf Lake © Jared Clarke

We visited the 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 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 pair of River Otters surprised us when they popped out of the reeds and played along the marsh edge. The weather was also "for the ducks", as they say – as rain soon set in and encouraged us to enjoy the comforts of coffee and pastries in a nearby café. Located in a beautiful, historic building it made for a fine way to wait out the passing showers. The rain cleared out as we headed south to Johnson Mills Shorebird Reserve – just in time for the spectacle that awaited us. Arriving an hour before high tide, we were awed by the sight of many thousands of Semipalmated Sandpipers (along with smaller numbers of other species such as Least Sandpiper and Semipalmated Plovers) foraging on the vast mudflats as the tide rushed in. The number swelled along with the waters until eventually ~80,000 (as counted 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 a hungry Peregrine Falcon looking for lunch, other times for reasons unclear to us. Perhaps they just enjoyed making our jaws drop!



Belted Kingfisher © Jared Clarke



Semipalmated Sandpipers roosting © Jared Clarke



Semipalmated Sandpipers launching © Jared Clarke



Peregrine Falcon chasing Semipalmated Sandpipers © Jared Clarke

August 15-16: 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 visit to Kouchibouguac National Park began with a morning stroll

along the Northumberland Strait and 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". Nine species of shorebirds paraded the beach and mudflats including Ruddy Black-bellied Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers, Sanderlings and our first Ruddy Turnstones of the trip. Several raptors were spotted during the walk, including a Northern Harrier, Osprey and Bald Eagle. A late morning hike on the Bog Trail produced not only SIX of our target eastern Palm Warblers, but also a Broad-winged Hawk and a Purple Finch singing from the treetops. Cicadas buzzed in the hot afternoon sun as we enjoyed lunch at near the river, and we took time to visit the interpretation centre and learn a little about the indigenous communities that once thrived along this coast.



Semipalmated Plover © Jared Clarke



Birding Kelly's Beach © Jared Clarke



Palm Warbler © Jared Clarke

The quaint town of Bouctouche also offered excellent birding. A sunrise walk around the hotel property turned up an array of species like Northern Parula, American Redstart, Gray Catbird and a rather unexpected Warbling Vireo. The parking lot at “La Pays de la Sagouine” (a period Acadian village) was busy with birds such as Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Hairy Woodpeckers and a mixed

flock of warblers including Blackburnian, Bay-breasted and Magnolia. A hike along the River Trail produced even more migrants such as Blue-headed Vireo and Chestnut-sided & Black-throated Blue Warblers. An elegant Solitary Sandpiper provided excellent looks as it foraged along the bank. Our picnic lunch took place at the Irving Arboretum – a stunning park that was hopping with birds. Hooded Merganser, Eastern Wood-peewee, Chipping Sparrows, Tennessee Warbler, Cape May Warbler and Wilson's Warbler were just some of our lunchtime highlights. Interesting butterflies also grabbed our attention amid the abundant flowers – Monarch, Viceroy and American Lady being among the more showy. An ice cream stop at "Le Petit Cremier" was especially popular, and fueled us up for an afternoon drive back to Saint John.



Blackburnian Warbler © Jared Clarke



Parking lot birding © Sarah Gutowsky



Solitary Sandpiper © Jared Clarke



Viceroy © Jared Clarke

August 17-20: Grand Manan Island After a relaxed night in Saint John, we made our way to the ferry 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 diverse birding opportunities. 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 very familiar with over the next few days. While our first ferry trip was a little wet and windy, we did manage to find a sheltered nook to watch birds such as Black-legged Kittiwake, Great Shearwater and Common Murres during the short sail. The day of our pelagic boat tour was much nicer – sunny and warm, if a little choppy on the water at times. Dozens of Great Shearwaters, Northern Gannets, Wilson's & Leach's Storm-Petrels and a lone Pomarine Jaeger sailed effortlessly over the waves while Harbour Porpoise swam alongside the boat. Flocks of both Red and Red-necked Phalaropes skittered past, and occasional Atlantic Puffins appeared to entertain us as we coasted along. With a little patience, we were also able to find some beautiful Humpback Whales, Atlantic White-sided Dolphins, a Fin Whale and even a large Mola Mola (Ocean Sunfish) feeding in the deep ocean waters.



Great Shearwater © Jared Clarke



Phalaropes © Jared Clarke



Atlantic white-sided dolphin and Great Shearwater © Jared Clarke



Leach's Storm Petrel © Jared Clarke

On land, we also explored many parts 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 close encounters with Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, while an especially adept Bald Eagle snatched up an unsuspecting gull in front of our

eyes – twice! High tide pushed several secretive Nelson's Sparrows out of the marsh and into view – including one very cooperative individual that posed for everyone. 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 nearly a dozen species of warblers including lots of Black-throated Green and our only Canada & Nashville Warblers of the trip. The biggest surprise came in the form of a Carolina Wren family right alongside our hotel verandah – a species that has been expanding into Atlantic Canada in recent years but still very unexpected.



Semipalmated Sandpipers © Jared Clarke



Nelson's Sparrow © Jared Clarke



Black-throated Green Warbler © Jared Clarke



Carolina Warbler fledgling © Jared Clarke

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 several Arctic Terns, Black-legged Kittiwakes and

numerous Bonaparte’s Gulls. Back in Saint John, our final birding stop at Irving Nature Park produced two new species for the trip - a locally rare Great Egret and a lone drake Surf Scoter.



sunset © Jared Clarke

We reminisced and shared our favourite memories over dinner before having to say our good-byes. What a fantastic trip, with a wonderful group of people!