



## **Newfoundland Birding Tour with Canadian Geographic Trip Report (June 2024)**

[Link: Newfoundland Birding Tour with Canadian Geographic Trip Report \(June 2024\)](#)

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Our group, along with Canadian Geographic Society ambassador, Astronaut Dr. Dave Williams, embarked on an incredible expedition to explore the rock and all its wonders! The Island's breathtaking scenery was a splendid backdrop for rare birds and spectacular mammals. The brightly colored quaint towns and friendly warm local people who were always eager to please along with their entertaining stories and songs brightened our journey.

### **June 5 - Arrival**

Everyone arrived safely in St. John's, Newfoundland, some choosing to arrive a day or two early to visit the capital, St. Johns by touring the historical streets, and sites such as the Basilica. We met for dinner at The Cannery in the Hilton Garden Inn. It was great to meet everyone and to discuss their expectations as well as the tour itinerary. It was apparent from the beginning that we had a wonderful group of enthusiastic nature lovers and we couldn't wait to get the show on the road around this great province. It was impressive how well everyone got along!

### **June 6 - Bidgood Park, Witless Bay & Cape Spear**

After a good night's rest, we headed downstairs for a delicious hot buffet breakfast at The Cannery. As rain and some dense fog surrounded us, we decided to head downtown and locate the Pink-footed Goose that was present at Burton's Pond, but unfortunately, we dipped. However, this first stop was still very productive as the resident Hooded Merganser, some ducks, and Common Terns were observed at the pond. We then turned our attention to the pair of Tufted Ducks at the nearby Kenny's Pond and located them along with a Greater Scaup, We were all a little wet at this point, so we got back on the road and visited Bidgood Park near the historic town of Goulds. We walked around the park for over an hour to enjoy the scenery and all the birds singing around us. This park is gorgeous with its boreal habitat! We added a Wilson's Snipe, a Spotted Sandpiper, a Northern

Harrier, a Merlin, some White-winged Crossbills, Pine Siskins, 4 species of Warblers (Black-and-white, Blackpoll, Yellow-rumped, and a few Northern Waterthrushes) and 4 Sparrows (White-throated, Song, Swamp, and Dark-eyed Junco) to our tour list.



*Blackpoll Warbler © Tim Arthur*

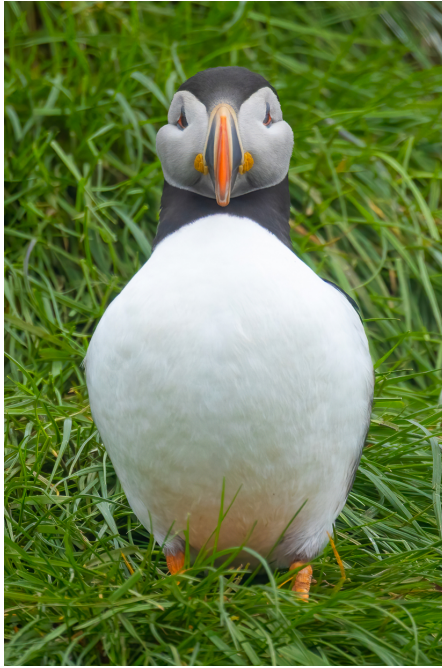
Before lunch, at a great little restaurant called Arbour, we stopped at Maggoty Cove Pond in Witless Bay. Here we observed a Belted Kingfisher and a few Ring-billed Gulls. The highlight of the day was the Witless Bay Eco. Reserve tour with O'Brien's Whale & Bird Tour, on their double-decker boat and the very charismatic interpreter Frank, we headed to Gull Island. On our way, we were fortunate to observe a few Leach's Storm-Petrels and some Black Guillemots through the fog. At what is considered one of the largest Alcid colonies in the world, we observed thousands of Atlantic Puffins, Common Murres, Black-legged Kittiwakes, some Razorbills, and 2 Thick-billed Murres. We enjoyed Frank singing traditional Newfoundland songs on the way back and spotted a few Northern Gannets flying closely around the boat.



*Razorbill, Gull Island © Mitch Doucet*



*Thick-billed Murre, Gull Island © Mitch Doucet*



*Atlantic Puffin, Gull Island © Mitch Doucet*

That afternoon, we stopped in Cape Spear, the easternmost point in North America, but the fog was so thick we were unable to see the lighthouse. We discovered 2 American Pipit for our tour list and observed a few Northern Gannets close to the cliff. At the end of a full day of birding, we decided to make a last stop at Burton's Pond before dark in an attempt to locate the Pink-footed Goose. We got lucky this time! We were able to observe this rare Goose at close range until dusk.



*Pink-footed Goose, Burtons Pond © Mitch Doucet*

For dinner, that evening, the group walked downtown to the YellowBelly Brewery & Public House.

This historical building was built in 1846 and still stands after the 1892 St. John's fire. The day ended with 47 bird species after a dozen stops.

## **June 7 - La Manche & Cape Race**

After another delicious breakfast at The Cannery at the Hilton Garden Inn in St. John's we packed our bags to change Motels that evening. At La Manche Provincial Park, a Ruffed Grouse, Boreal Chickadees, Fox Sparrows, and a few Warblers, including Black-throated Green were observed. A Hermit Thrush was also heard singing in the distance. Afterward, we made a quick stop before lunch in Cape Broyle to observe our first pair of Greater Yellowlegs and 4 Double-crested Cormorants. We had lunch in Ferryland, one of the most scenic villages on the East coast of the Avalon. At the Tetley Tea Room, some of us enjoyed a nice cup of tea and dessert. Our next stop was at Cape Race but the fog prevented us from doing any serious scanning for birds. The cliffs overlooking the misty water were very scenic.



*Birding at Cape Race Lighthouse © Mitch Doucet*



*Cape Race Lighthouse from drone © Mitch Doucet*

On our return from Cape Race, we observed our first Northern Pintails and Northern Harriers. We had dinner at the Edge of Avalon Inn. After this, our Canadian Geographic ambassador Doctor and Canadian astronaut Dave Williams gave an inspiring presentation "Exploration - The Relentless Quest for Knowledge" about underwater and other environmental training that prepares astronauts for space.



*Dr Dave Williams giving presentation © Mitch Doucet*

Mitch Doucet presented "Atlantic Ocean Sea Monster" at the end of a full day of exploration. The presentation was about the Cetaceans (Whales and other sea mammals) that you can expect to

observe in the Atlantic Ocean. We ended the day with 46 species.

## **June 8 - Mistaken Point Tour & St. Mary's Bay**

The Edge of Avalon Inn opened their restaurant early for us so that we could get an early breakfast and get on the road. Our first stop was an unscheduled stop on Powles Head Island and lighthouse which proved to be a very good expedition. Gray Catbirds, 2 Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, a few Fox Sparrows, Boreal Chickadees, and dozens of Warblers including 12 Blackpoll Warblers and 16 Wilson's Warblers were added to our tour list!



*Powles Head Island © Mitch Doucet*

At the Edge of the Avalon Interpretive Centre in Portugal Cove, we learned about the history of the area and the fossils. Our guides Edrina & Adriana from the Edge of the Avalon Interpretive Centre led us to Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve, an ancient fossil site buried under ash for 565 million years. Along the way, the group was treated to the sight of a Willow Ptarmigan, a lifer for participants including Mitch! Although the hike was long, the scenery was spectacular and the weather was perfect for the 6 km (3.7 miles) hike.



*Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve, Edge of Avalon © Mitch Doucet*



*Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve © Mitch Doucet*



*Mistaken Point, looking at fossils © Mitch Doucet*

After the hike, we ate a boxed lunch from the Edge of Avalon Inn and drove to St. Brides that afternoon, where we had dinner at Da Bird's Eye. After dinner and listening to owners Maude & Anna's great stories, we walked back to the Motel while listening to the evening birds including a Wilson's Snipe. We ended the day with 30 species.

## **June 9 - Cape St. Mary's & Castle Hill**

Da Bird's Eye was kind enough to open early for us and went overboard providing us with an amazing breakfast! Maude then entertained us with more stories. Although a few guests had trouble with the Newfoundland accent we all had a great time! Our first stop that day was Cape St. Mary's where they have one of the largest colonies of Northern Gannets in North America. This colony has suffered big losses in recent years due to bird flu, but there is hope that the numbers will recover. We arrived very early to a foggy and lightly drizzling morning but everything cleared out by the time we got to the point. We observed about 15,000 Northern Gannets on their nests at very close range. There were also thousands of other alcids and up to 2000 Black-legged Kittiwakes.



*Northern Gannets at Cape St. Mary's © Mitch Doucet*



*Northern Gannets on cliff at Cape St. Mary's © Mitch Doucet*



*Northern Gannet pair, Cape St. Mary's © Mitch Doucet*

As we were leaving the parking lot we heard Horned larks and were able to locate 3 of them.



*Horned Lark © Mitch Doucet*

We had a very nice, and filling lunch at the Harold Hotel in Placentia. We visited Castle Hill National Historic Site. It is named for the French and English fortifications dating back to the mid-1600s in Placentia, The history and scenery were the main attractions at this location, although we saw several species of birds including Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Blackpoll Warbler, Boreal Chickadee, and we heard Fox Sparrows singing.



*Yellow-bellied Flycatcher © Mitch Doucet*

We had dinner at the Clode Sound Motel, where our fabulous Canadian Geographic ambassador Dr. Dave Williams gave us another mesmerizing presentation.



*Dr. Dave Williams giving second presentation © Mitch Doucet*

## **June 10 - Terra Nova National Park**

After a well-deserved night's rest, we had a bountiful breakfast at the Clode Sound Motel. Robyn, went all out to ensure we were well-fed and cared for! We birded all day at the Terra Nova National

Park and hiked about 8 km (5 miles) on a nice sunny, but windy day. As we entered the park, we had a mother and calf Moose cross our path. We didn't want to leave our vehicle and spook them, so this was the best shot we got as they were walking down the road.



*Moose calf, Terra Nova National Park © Mitch Doucet*

This morning's walk around Sandy Pond brought us four Olive-sided Flycatchers, a family of 4 Canada Jays (including 2 fledglings), and a Magnolia Warbler as we were ready to leave.



*Olive-sided Flycatcher © Mitch Doucet*

We had a nice boxed lunch from the Clode Sound Motel and continued our exploration of the park. The afternoon walk around the Terra Nova Head Quarters brought us a Black-backed Woodpecker, 2 Red-breasted Mergansers, a pair of Purple Finchs, and a few more Common Terns. We also observed a River Otter trying to get a fish bigger than him to shore! We finished the night with a great dinner and enjoyed live music at the Harbour Quarter's Inn. We ended the day with 35 species.



*Common Tern, Terra Nova National Park © Mitch Doucet*



*Harbour Quarter's Wharf © Mitch Doucet*

## June 11 - Trinity and Cape Bonavista

After an early bagged breakfast from the Harbour Quarters Inn, we headed to Trinity Bay for an exciting outing. Our first activity of the day was an incredible 3-hour tour of Trinity Bay with Trinity Eco-Tours Zodiac accompanied by skipper Steve.



*Group going on tour in Trinity Bay © Tim Arthur*

The day's highlight was the Steller's Sea Eagle that's been roaming the East Coast since 2021! Mitch had the incredible opportunity to observe this impressive bird in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and now Newfoundland but it was a lifer for everyone in our group!



*Stellar's Sea Eagle, Trinity Bay © Mitch Doucet*

We had another very nice lunch at the Dock Marina Restaurant. The afternoon was wrapped up in Cape Bonavista, where we visited the lighthouse, some incredible natural formations known as the Dungeon, the Chimney, and other spectacular scenery. While in the area we kept an eye out for any wildlife and birds, then added an American Wigeon to our tour list. We watched 3 Red Fox cubs playing and lounging among the rocks near the lighthouse who didn't notice our presence. We finished the day at the Puffin Cafe for dinner. We ended the day with 37 species.



*The Dungeon, Cape Bonavista, Newfoundland © Tim Arther*



*Red Fox, Cape Bonavista © Mitch Doucet*



*Red Fox, Cape Bonavista © Mitch Doucet*

## **June 12 - Elliston to St. John's**

We had breakfast at Skipper's in the Harbour Quarter's Inn before heading to the Elliston Atlantic Puffin colony, which is one of the most accessible colonies in North America. Afterward, we made an unscheduled stop at the end of Shore Rd, Elliston to find a small Common Tern Colony. Everyone was impressed with the nearby store which had amazing carvings in bone and moose antlers. At this point, everyone was tired after the many days of amazing birding and spectacular scenery.



*Our birding group © Tim Arthur*



*Atlantic Puffin, Eliston © Mitch Doucet*

[Silly-Group-Shot-Tim-Arthur] Group photo - Elliston Atlantic Puffin - Elliston © Tim Arthur [Atlantic-Puffin-Eliston-Mitch-Doucet] Atlantic Puffin - Elliston © Mitch Doucet



*Common Tern © Mitch Doucet*



*Wearing our Canadian Geographic hats © Tim Arthur*

On our way back to St. John's we stopped in Clarenville at the Stellar Kitchen for our last lunch with the group. During a little pit stop, we found a great hotspot at Mill Pond where we had 16 species and added the 2 last species to our tour list: 3 Green-winged Teal and Cedar Waxwings. We ended where we began our journey in Newfoundland's capital. We swung by Quidi Vidi Lake before heading toward the Hilton Garden Inn. We all met at The Cannery for our last dinner. We shared stories and laughed for a few hours around a good meal, and drinks before sharing some hugs and saying our goodbyes. We ended the day with 30 species.



## **June 13 - Departure**

We ended our tour with 84 species and a happy group of birders and nature lovers. Everyone made it home safely with memories that they will cherish forever. [Newfoundland with Canadian Geographic Bird List \(June 2024\)](#)