Eagle-Eye Tours



Quebec in Fall: Birds & Whales Trip Report 2025

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When writing an Eagle-Eye Tours trip report, nothing is more important than capturing the BIG IDEAS flowing from the tour… …so this trip report begins with something big – specifically, whales. Very big whales. Part of our Quebec in Fall: Birds and Whales tour includes whale watching, and we had a wonderful introduction from the Pointe Noire lookout, peering down at the confluence of two mighty rivers – the Saguenay river, and the even grander St. Lawrence river – which creates the fabulous mix of nutrients that makes this area an ecological gem. From our eyrie we were thrilled to see Beluga whales, members of an isolated population of almost a thousand of these friendly looking white whales that grace this area.



Whale spotting from Point Noire © Gareth Thomson

The next day found us in a whale watching boat, and our group had the immense good fortune to see a majestic Fin Whale – the second biggest whale in the world – spout, splash, and dive off the bow of our boat. After the Fin whale, there's only one bigger thrill possible – and we got it. The Blue whale is the largest animal that has ever lived on our planet, and one showed up while we were still hyperventilating slightly after our first sighting. It was a superb privilege to watch one of these rare leviathans as it fed, using its baleen to capture the several tons of krill that it eats daily. Its blowhole was the size of a manhole cover!



Blue Whale © Sumeet Mukherjee



Blue Whale © Arnaud Valade

On this tour, one of the many jewels in the crown of is the Tadoussac Dunes, a fabulous flyway where a torrent of birds fly south over the land during the fall migration to avoid crossing the St. Lawrence River, which is dozens of kilometers wide in this area. Our group spent a thrilling couple of hours there one sunny, windy morning, trying hard to keep track of the fabulous array of migrating raptors that streamed past us: half a dozen Broad-winged Hawks! Two Goshawks, looking powerful, purposeful, and murderous! An astounding 134 Sharp-shinned Hawks!



Broad-winged Hawk © Sumeet Mukherjee



Guests at the fabulous Hotel Tadoussac © Cathy Lloyd

No account of this tour would be complete without talking about shorebirds: lots and lots of shorebirds. Yellowlegs and sandpipers and shorebirds, oh my! At one point during a beach walk we almost stepped on a large flock of tiny, well-camouflaged Semipalmated Sandpipers. They could have flown but they were reluctant to do so, and small wonder – these birds looked almost spherical, having gorged themselves on beach invertebrates to continue their long journey to the wintering grounds in the Caribbean and South America.



Semipalmated Sandpiper © Arnaud Valade



Lesser Yellowlegs © Sumeet Mukherjee

Even more exciting were the two Whimbrels that one of our astute guests spotted, large and long-limbed birds that flew from beneath our feet and perched on a nearby rock. Almost immediately they were chased by a young and inexperienced Peregrine Falcon, who called off the hunt, wheeled to harass an indignant Double-crested Cormorant, and then flew rapidly off, seeking easier prey.



Whimbrel © Sumeet Mukherjee



Short-billed Dowitcher © Arnaud Valade

The poet Alfred Lord Tennyson speaks about “Nature, red in tooth and claw,“ and that theme rapidly emerged on this tour. Our group was delighting in the antics of a White-throated Sparrow in front of us when the unfortunate creature was seized in the claws of a Sharp-shinned Hawk.



White-throated Sparrow © Sumeet Mukherjee



Sharp-shinned Hawk © Sumeet Mukherjee

Later, as we scanned a flock of several thousand gulls the entire assembly flew up in a panic: when the blizzard of white wings ended, we saw a massive Great Black-backed Gull methodically plucking and eating the Bonaparte's Gull it had caught.



Bonaparte's Gull © Sumeet Mukherjee

The next day we followed every twist and turn of a fleeing thrush, being chased by that bird-eating specialist, the Merlin. We weren’t sure whether to root for the hungry Merlin or the desperate passerine - but anyway, the prey got away and the predator rocketed off to find its next meal.



American Herring Gull © Arnaud Valade



Black-legged Kittiwake © Arnaud Valade

We had lots of riveting moments like this - but possibly the most exhilarating came towards the end of our tour as we followed the south shore back towards Quebec city. Snow Geese! We were enjoying the sight of several hundred of these spectacular black and white birds roosting on the rocks of a river that flows into the St. Lawrence when we began to hear more goose calls, high-pitched and urgent, from behind us: we turned and beheld row upon countless row of geese flying

towards us, thousands of them descending upon us, phalanxes of these vibrant and majestic creatures landing in front of us, seemingly filling the entire world with their wild and restless cries.



Snow Goose © Brent Ghelfi



Flock of Snow Geese © Brent Ghelfi

It was electric. It was exhilarating. The biggest smiles of all were found on the faces of the two guides as we watched the guests' necks turning on a swivel as they tried to take it all in, their eyes

wide with wonder. It is moments like these that Eagle-Eye guides live for… *"… The world offers itself to your imagination/calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting/ over and over announcing your place/in the family of things."* Extract from the poem 'Wild Geese' by Mary Oliver.



Our group © Gareth Thomson

Quebec in Fall eBird list (Sep 2025)