Eagle-Eye Tours

Quebec in Fall – Birds and Whales Tour Report Sept 2021

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Our recent Quebec trip was outstanding, and a great adventure for everyone! We discovered some wonderful things together… For one thing, we observed that the seeing of birds can fall into three categories. First, the Gift Bird: the **Cooper's Hawk** eating its unfortunate prey on a lamppost by the hotel. The **American Bittern** that floated in full view beside our group, then walked calmly down the path in front of us, in full view. The **Peregrine Falcon** calmly eating a gull on the beach, sitting amidst a blizzard of gull feathers like some well-dressed diner who has inexplicably chosen an exploded mattress as a place to eats his meal.

American Bittern on our trail

Peregrine Falcon eating a gull

Then the Earned Bird, the ones we worked hard for: pssshhhing like mad to get a better look at a **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, craning our necks skyward to see the **White-winged Crossbill**, and blinking away the wind-created tears to see the **Atlantic Puffin** as it raced away through the swells. Lastly, the Mystery Bird, the exciting yet ultimately unidentified bird that got away. The ones seen out of the corner of our eye, or that flew into a bush and then maddeningly dematerialized.

Frustrating, of course – but an opportunity to philosophize. What would life be without mystery? Sometimes when viewing nature, exciting events pile up on top of one another in rapid succession, creating a clinical condition that psychologists [or at least me] call Naturalist's Euphoria. This happened to our group as soon as we got out of the vehicles at the dock at Port-au-Persil: **Bald Eagle** directly overhead! Look, there's a mink sprinting across the trail! Far out to sea, the trip's first **Beluga Whales**! Then suddenly a massive **Minke Whale** rolls to the surface, just in front of us. This onslaught of exciting viewing caused our entire group to snap to attention, eyes bright, binoculars at the ready, heads swiveling to see what might happen next in nature's pageant. Magic!

Rapt with attention at Port-au-Persil

Herring Gull puzzling over his next meal

Nothing beats that feeling of excitement – we'll always remember watching two **Peregrine Falcons** as they chased **Black Ducks**, **Snow Geese**, and one another at **Cap Tourmente** - and our pulses raced on a number of occasions on this trip. Fair to say, though, we really enjoyed the many other layers of experience offered by a birding tour. First and foremost the people, always the people: the warm camaraderie within our little group, as we got to know one another and laughed our way down the coast. And of course the wonderful, warm-hearted Quebecois, and their evident pride in their home place: our tour took us along the north shore of the Saint Laurence River, and over the course of several days every house we saw was neatly painted and in great condition.

Some of Quebec's attractive homes

Marie has done many Eagle-Eye tours!

Team Quebec

We saw this pride as we toured the many landscapes: from Taiga to rocky oceanside, from boreal forest to marshland. We visited many federally, provincially, and even municipally protected areas, and were impressed by how well maintained these parks were. These folk care for, and invest in, nature. Another wonderful layer of meaning: how the non-living world drives the living world. There is no better example than in **Tadoussac**, where massive freshwater currents from the colliding

Saguenay and Saint Lawrence River mix with Atlantic saltwater to create a rich brew of nutrients, then microscopic life, then invertebrates and small fish that support, well, everything else. At times on our whale-watching tour our trilingual interpreter sounded like an auctioneer, his voice rising in excitement as he tried to orient us to more than a half dozen whales of four different species – **Fin, Humpback, Minke, and Beluga** - that were spouting and rolling and breaching all around us. Pity the poor birders on board, for – in addition to the whales – we were besieged by novel and fascinating sea birds: we watched a **Parasitic Jaeger** chasing a **Black-legged Kittiwake** in the hope it might regurgitate its food for a scrumptious snack. A veritable blizzard of **Bonaparte Gulls**! **Common Murre**, **Razorbills**, **Gannets**! We had to have our heads on a swivel as we tried to keep up, viewing these superb creatures as they swirled around us in one of Canada's best nature hotspots. It was magic…

Happy participant (Marje) on our whale-watching tour.

Thanks to participants Rita Friesen and Stan Peck for their permission to use their photos in this blog post.