



Quebec in Fall Trip Report (Sep 13 - 22, 2024)

[Link: Quebec in Fall Trip Report \(Sep 13 - 22, 2024\)](#)

Our group of 11 participants, guided by Andra Florea and Alyssa DeRubeis, recorded 116 bird species! From September 14-21, 2024, our tour covered both sides of the St Lawrence River between Quebec City and Portneuf-sur-mer. However, we spent most of our time on the north shore. Our species total included a remarkable 25 waterfowl species, 9 shorebird species, and 10 raptor species. Incredible up-close views of five marine mammals species and a handful of banded birds (including multiple Northern Saw-whet Owls) were enjoyed by all of us. Read on for more details about our adventure!



Red-necked Phalaropes © Alan Gertler

Day 1: Quebec City

Our very first destination was the unique Île d'Orléans. This site is in the middle of the St Lawrence River and is famous for strawberry fields and countryside views. We met up with a local ornithologist who knows the best birding spots in the area. We walked along the peaceful roadside while accompanied by mixed flocks of warblers (Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, and Blackpoll) as well as popular bird feeder species, like the striking Blue Jay. Our guide Alyssa even detected the fourth record of a Carolina Wren on the island. Our stroll ended with excitement, when a songbird, perhaps a warbler, met its demise in the talons of a Merlin.



Yellow-rumped Warbler © Alan Gertler

Our second stop of the day was at the famous Montmorency Falls, where we ate a picnic lunch while admiring some migrating raptors: Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, and Turkey Vulture. From high up at the top of the falls, we spotted a trio of Common Mergansers loafing and diving. How neat to see these ducks from such a great height!



Common Mergansers © Alan Gertler



Montmorency Falls © Andra Florea

Day 2: Cap Tourmente Wildlife Area

Today we searched for waterbirds and visited the banding station at Cap Tourmente. We started at the Marais des Graves pond, where we got our first taste of difficult duck identification in non-breeding plumages. Our teachers were American Wigeon, Gadwall, and Wood Duck. A Pied-billed Grebe pair and a lone Common Gallinule popped up between the reeds at the excitement of the whole group. These two species allowed us to practice our ability to differentiate duck-like waterbirds from ducks.



Gadwall © Alain Gertler

Next stop was the banding station. Andra gave a lovely presentation on how banding stations operate and their important contributions to ornithology, particularly migration ecology and population ecology. We were lucky during our visit, because the station caught a rather late Black-billed Cuckoo! The banding team also caught two Sharp-shinned Hawks, two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Blue-headed Vireo, Northern Waterthrush, and Wilson's Warbler. It's always a spectacle to see birds in the hand, especially such speedy and sneaky birds!



Black-billed Cuckoo © Alan Gertler



Sharp-shinned Hawk © Gwyn Robson



Blue-headed Vireo © Alan Gertler



Andra holding a Wilson's Warbler © Alyssa DeRubeis

Our last stop at Cap Tourmente was the large viewing blind. Conditions were less than ideal with backlighting, distance, and heat waves, but that didn't stop us from adding several waterfowl to our trip list: American Black Duck, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, and swirls of aloft Snow Geese.



American Black Duck © Alan Gertler



Green-winged Teal © Alan Gertler

Day 3: L'Isle-aux-Coudres and Grands-Jardins National Park

We sauntered along a coastal park on L'Isle-aux-Coudres, where we caught glimpses of Black-crowned Night Herons flying to their roosts. We also stopped at a nearby pond that provided excellent views of female Hooded Mergansers and a female Ring-necked Duck, two new species for

our trip! Although the tide was not cooperating that morning, we got stunning views of the mountainous landscapes of Charlevoix from the island. We appreciated the tranquility of the St Lawrence River, which was getting wider as we drove towards Tadoussac.



Exploring L'Isle-aux-Coudres © Alyssa DeRubeis

Once we were back to the mainland, we drove out to Grands-Jardins National Park to try for some boreal species. After a quick lunch, our eyes feasted on the red foliage of blueberries carpeting the ground alongside minty-green lichens, all nestled in a sea of spruce-covered mountains! While enjoying these truly boreal landscapes and colors, we got good looks at mixed flocks of Golden- and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Yellow-rumped Warblers, plus a new trip species, Palm Warbler. A special treat on our drive out of the park was an adult Common Loon teaching a juvenile how to fish. Soon this young loon must be a good hunter so it can survive its first winter on the Atlantic Ocean.



Dark-eyed Junco © Alain Gertler



Common Loon © Alain Gertler

Day 4: Tadoussac Bird Observatory and Pelagic Whale Tour

Our first day in Tadoussac demanded a visit to the Tadoussac Bird Observatory. The banding station showed some bird feeder visitors up close: Black-capped Chickadee and Blue Jay. A nearby river sand bar hosted Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, which graced us with close looks. At the hawk

count platform, we took a crash course in Raptor Identification 101, where we studied distantly migrating Sharp-shinned Hawks, Northern Harriers, American Kestrel, and Merlin. Shape, size, and flight pattern were useful criteria for determining raptor species, all of which were deemed useful throughout the rest of the tour. We got a very quick glance at migrating Lesser Black-backed Gulls as well.



Blue Jay © Alan Gertler



Solitary Sandpiper © Alan Gertler

In the afternoon, we took a whale-watching tour in Saguenay Marine Park, and it did not disappoint! Multiple Minke Whales and a large pod of Beluga Whales were actively feeding, sometimes approaching the boat quite closely. The shyer Harbour Porpoise (a Globally Threatened species) made an all-too-short appearance. Watchful Grey Seals and playful Harbor Seals were fun to observe. And we cannot forget about the birds: the big highlight, perhaps even of the entire tour, was a flock of a dozen Red-necked Phalaropes feeding alongside a raft of Bonaparte's Gulls. This tiny Arctic breeding shorebird can only be seen during migration on the St Lawrence and is easily lost between small waves! Other nice bird sightings included close views of Razorbill, a Black Guillemot, and a group of 8 Common Loons in both breeding and non-breeding plumages.



Minke Whale © Alan Gerlter



Gray Seal © Alyssa DeRubeis



Whale watching tour © Alyssa DeRubeis

Day 5: Les Escoumins and Portneuf-sur-Mer

Today we checked out many spots. First we ventured inland to Les Bergeronnes in hopes of finding some boreal specialties. At the end of our short walk, we crossed paths with a roving pair of Canada Jays!



Boreal forest © Alyssa DeRubeis

We then returned to the coast at Pointe de la Croix, where American Pipits were on the move in the hundreds. Many were walking around on the beach, not caring much at all about our presence. Further north at Pointe-des-Fortin, we were mesmerized by thousands of sea ducks: Common Eider plus Black, White-winged and Surf Scoters. A sleepy flock of Semipalmated Sandpipers tickled us pink with their fluffed-out stance and tameness.



Common Eiders © Alan Gertler



Semipalmated Sandpipers © Alan Gertler

We ended the day with great views of Bonaparte's Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, and Green-winged Teal loafing on the rocks at Baie des Escoumins.



Bonaparte's Gull © Alan Gertler

Day 6: Pelagic Birding Tour and Owl Banding (Tadoussac Bird Observatory)

Up until today, our group had been spoiled with gorgeous sunny skies. However, fog was present throughout the morning, which made birding a little more difficult. We still enjoyed lovely coastal views at Cap-de-Bon-Desir and our picnic lunch spot Pointe a John. In the afternoon, we hopped on a

boat and ventured out into Parc marin du Saguenay. Neat seabirds like Razorbill and Black-legged Kittiwake gifted us with some close and personal looks. A Great Black-backed Gull fended off several juvenile Herring Gulls from its big fish prize. We were impressed by the size of both the world's largest gull and its catch!



Razorbill © Alan Gertler



Great Black-backed Gull © Alan Gertler

Arguably the most exciting part of the day was attending the nighttime owl program at Tadoussac Bird Observatory. Not only did the banding station catch three Northern Saw-whet Owls for all of us to see, but two of our participants adopted owls, and as such had the opportunity to release them. One bird was particularly tame and inquisitive, sitting on the participant's hand and looking at her for a long time before she flew off into the forest. This does not always happen, so needless to say it was a very special moment!



Northern Saw-whet Owl release © Andra Florea

Day 7: Crossing the River and Parc côtier Kiskotuk

Our third “pelagic” tour entailed a 90-minute ferry ride to the south shore of the St Lawrence. While on board, we spotted a smattering of seabirds: Black Guillemot, Northern Gannet, Red-throated Loon, Razorbill, and Black-legged Kittiwake. A small pod of Harbour Porpoises made a close and quick pass by the ferry, while tons of Belugas foraged further out.



Black-legged Kittiwake © Alan Gertler



Beluga Whale © Alyssa DeRubeis

The marshes of Parc côtier Kiskotuk were rife with waterfowl! We tallied 11 species of duck here, mainly dabbling ducks like Northern Shoveler and Blue-winged Teal. A pair of Ruddy Ducks was a great find, as this is an uncommon species this far northeast in Canada. Hundreds of Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs were very vocal and active, providing endless entertainment.



Ruddy Duck © Alan Gertler



Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs © Alan Gertler

Day 8: South Shore of the St Lawrence

We spent most of the day driving south along the shore. While en route to end the tour in Quebec City, we checked out several shorebirds hotspots. While most of the sites were fairly calm due to low tide, excitement awaited us at the very last stop.



Exploring the shores in St Denis de la Bouteillerie © Gwyn Robson

At Parc Le Jardin des Souches, we managed to relocate a previously-reported local rarity, the Willet, which was a lifer for many. A Short-billed Dowitcher was also mixed in with the numerous yellowlegs, adding yet another species to our tour checklist!



Willet © Alan Gertler

Thanks to our enthusiastic and observant tour group, we had an amazing trip! We all shared great views of birds, sea mammals, and autumn scenery along the St Lawrence River.



Quebec tour 2024

[Quebec in Fall Birding List 2024](#)